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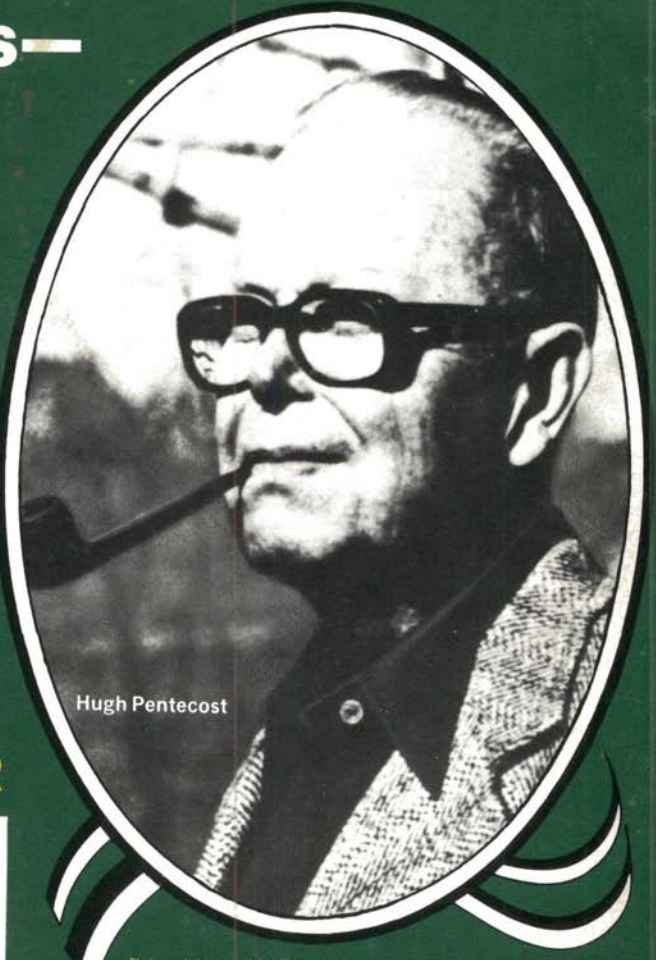

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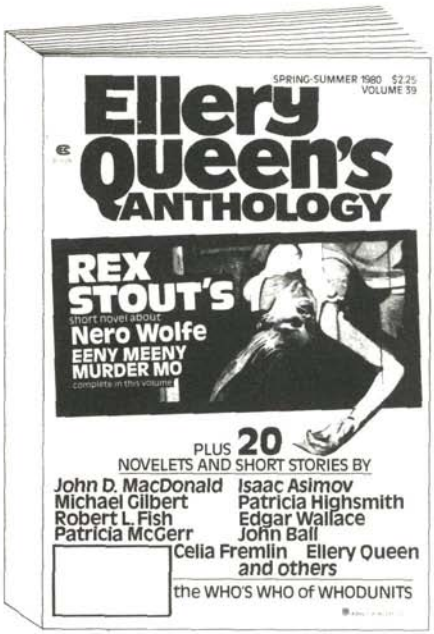

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a *NEW* Simon Ark story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

In which Simon Ark, who has claimed to be two thousand years old and has spent those twenty centuries battling the force of evil, investigates a mystery that is a mere two hundred and twenty-five years old. Child's-play for a man obsessed with dark doings, the more bizarre the better, the more weird the more feared . . .

THE WEAPON OUT OF THE PAST

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"As a student of American history," Simon Ark was saying to me, "you are surely aware of the Battle of Lonely Tree, fought two hundred and twenty-five years ago this week during the first year of the French and Indian War."

"I never pretended to be a student of American history," I protested. "I'm a book editor. If I'm doing a book on history I'm a history expert. Next week it might be gardening or comic strips."

"Nevertheless, I think you should journey with me to southern Pennsylvania, where some local residents plan to reenact the Battle of Lonely Tree at a pageant this week."

I'd known Simon Ark long enough to realize there was something afoot. "What are you investigating this time? Certainly not the French and Indian War?"

"There's an old stone farmhouse which figured in the battle in a most unusual manner. The owners have written me about it and invited me to come out this week during the pageant."

"A mystery," I surmised.

"But one that's two hundred and twenty-five years old."

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"A murder?"

"No, my friend. That's the surprising part. The mystery is why the original owner of the house was *not* killed!"

I knew I was hooked again, and there was no point in fighting it. I phoned my wife Shelly and told her Simon and I would be driving down to Pennsylvania the following morning.

There are times when Simon Ark has claimed to be nearly 2000 years old, but driving with me through New Jersey the following morning he seemed like any vigorous white-haired man in his seventies. I'd known him for 25 years and he hadn't changed in all that time, so I'd stopped trying to guess his real age. All I knew was that I'd probably catch up to him in another quarter-century.

I followed his directions into southern Pennsylvania, through an area of farms and rolling hills, across the Appalachians to our destination. It was late afternoon by the time we reached the village of Lonely Tree. "This is where the battle was fought?" I asked as we passed the crossroads that seemed the center of activity.

"Near here. It happened shortly before the French and Indian forces from Fort Duquesne defeated Braddock in July of 1755. But the battle itself was preceded by the event at the farmhouse. And an odd sort of event it was!"

"I expect it was odd if it attracted you, Simon."

"I believe this is the road we want," he said suddenly, pointing out a turn to the left that was named Lonely Tree Lane.

The scattering of houses thinned out even more here, and we came at last to a sturdy stone structure that looked more like a country gentleman's residence than my idea of an old farmhouse. We parked in the driveway and Simon led the way up the front walk.

The door was opened by a slim well-dressed man with gray hair who went well with the house. "You must be Simon Ark," he said, extending his hand. "I've enjoyed our correspondence."

Simon introduced him to me as Gregory Cliff, the present owner of the house, and we went inside. Though the place had obviously been remodeled since Colonial days, there was still an aura of early American charm about it. "We've tried to keep the exterior pretty much as it was in the Eighteenth Century," Cliff explained, leading us on a tour of the downstairs rooms. "Though of course it's a private home and we've felt free to modernize the interior. Here's the room you'll be most interested in seeing—the former dining room where the fight took place."

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We'd entered a cheery family room with a fireplace at one end and a television set at the other. A handsome middle-aged woman rose to greet us. "Hello, I'm Ada Cliff. So glad to have you in our home."

"I trust it's not an inconvenience," Simon murmured.

"We wouldn't have invited you if it were inconvenient."

"Ada and I are preparing for tomorrow's visitors," Gregory Cliff explained. "The house will be open as part of the pageant."

"It's very kind of you to let us see it a day early," Simon said. "And to invite us to spend the night." He was walking about the room as he spoke, examining the wood-paneled walls and the windows, though I couldn't imagine what he was looking for.

"I'm no historian," I admitted finally. "I guess you'll have to fill me in on what happened here."

Gregory Cliff smiled. "I'm an attorney myself. History is the domain of men like Mr. Ark. But the facts are simply enough stated. A few weeks prior to Braddock's defeat by the French and Indians, a scouting party from Fort Duquesne attempted to take this farmhouse and use it as a forward observation post. I imagine there was a special regard for these thick stone walls, able to withstand musket fire and arrows with ease. Anyway, a French officer named Colonel Muser, who worked closely with the Indian scouts, led a party of them here on that night in June 1755. Today such an operation would be called a commando raid, I suppose, though this was not technically British territory at the time. The raiding party reached this farmhouse shortly before midnight, and—"

Ada Cliff interrupted. "Tell him about the people who lived here at that time."

"The house was owned by a thirty-one-year-old farmer named Ned Feebish who lived here with his widowed mother, Nora Feebish. The people in the area considered Nora Feebish to be a witch."

Suddenly Simon Ark's interest in all this became clear. It wasn't American history that had brought him to this Colonial farmhouse. It was the hint of witches and dark doings. "What did they base this on?" I asked.

"Nothing but local superstition. Enchantments and hex signs have a long history in this region. Old Nora Feebish was probably as harmless as you or I."

The lawyer paused to light his pipe, and Ada Cliff took up the story. "These facts have been known for years, Mr. Ark, as has the fact that Ned Feebish somehow overpowered the French officer in

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this very room and sounded the alarm. The townspeople, with the help of a British detachment, turned back the French and Indians the following day in a brief skirmish that became known hereabouts as the Battle of Lonely Tree. Of course the defeat of Braddock the following month rendered it all for naught, but at least this old farmhouse had its moment of glory."

Her husband continued the story. "That was all anyone knew until a few months ago, when Ada came upon a remarkable document while cleaning out the attic. It's the document about which I wrote you, Mr. Ark."

"I wiped the centuries of dust from it and couldn't believe what I had," Ada said. "It was a diary or journal for the years 1755 and 1756, containing the planting and financial records of the farm. But more than that, inside the back cover of the book was written an account of that fateful night—an account by the Frenchman, Colonel Muser, himself!"

"You sent me a Xerox copy of that," Simon Ark said. "But perhaps it should be read, for the benefit of my friend here."

Gregory Cliff walked to a desk drawer and removed an ancient ledger with a stained and torn binding. He opened it to the rear and read, *"I have been asked by the occupants of this house to write down my account of what transpired here in the hour before midnight last. Though English is not my native tongue I dictate this to a woman neighbor who takes it down exactly as I speak. When I reached this farmhouse some few minutes before the stroke of twelve, I found the doors and windows locked against the night's roaming savages.*

"Leaving my band of scouts in the cornfield, I obtained entry by breaking a window in the dining room. I had only just entered when the man of the house, awakened by the breaking glass, confronted me and did battle. We fought in the darkness and he managed to seize my flintlock. My only other weapon was the Indian knife in my belt. My enemy fired once with the flintlock, missing me with the unfamiliar weapon. Before he could reload, I saw his head and shoulders silhouetted against the window and hurled the knife directly at his throat. In the same instant an old woman shouted something from the doorway.

"She called upon the Devil, in a tongue I barely understood. The blade of my knife never reached my adversary's throat. It seemed as if the weapon vanished in mid-flight as she shouted her curse. The young man jumped on me, striking me with my own pistol, and I fell to the floor. The alarm was raised and my followers fled by the way

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they had come. This morning, by daylight, I searched the room for the knife, but it was nowhere to be found. I do believe what they say is true. The old woman is a witch. Signed, Colonel Andre Muser."

"An interesting document," I admitted, studying the spidery writing in the book.

"A striking first-person document offering evidence of Colonial witchcraft," was Simon Ark's verdict. "Now you see why I came here, my friend."

Ada Cliff got to her feet. "Well, I think it's time we ate. We have the whole evening to discuss what happened here two hundred and twenty-five years ago."

They showed us to a large spare bedroom upstairs, where we'd be spending the night. As I washed up for dinner, Simon was peering out the window at the garden below. "The cornfield would have been there," he decided. "We're directly over the old dining room where it happened."

"Should we search for secret panels?" I asked.

"I already have," Simon answered quite seriously.

The meal, a pleasant blend of American and French dishes served with California white wine, had barely ended when the Cliffs had another visitor. His name was Milo Bates and he served as the village's part-time mayor. More important, he was the man in charge of the following day's pageant and mock battle.

"We're getting visitors from as far away as New York," he told the Cliffs proudly. "You better be ready for a flock of people goin' through your house."

"The New Yorkers have already arrived," I told the man. He couldn't have been much over 30, and I wondered what he did when he wasn't being mayor. "We're them."

"Oh! Good to meet you!" He introduced himself all over again and this time answered my unspoken question by adding, "I run the farm-and-garden store down by the crossroads. There's really not much mayorin' to do in Lonely Tree."

"Join us for coffee and dessert," Ada Cliff suggested.

He glanced at her as she urged him into a vacant chair. "Thanks. I could use some coffee, but hold the dessert." He patted his stomach. "Mary says she'll divorce me if I gain another pound."

They ran over the logistics of the following day, with Milo Bates producing timetables and diagrams of the course the mock battle would follow. For the moment the two-hundred-and-twenty-five-

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year-old witch named Nora Feebish was forgotten.

"I hate having them so close to the house," Ada Cliff interjected. "I can just see my garden getting trampled."

Her husband considered that. "Maybe in the morning I should put up the snow fence along that side of the garden."

"Might be a good idea," Bates agreed. "I put that garden in for you. I wouldn't want to see it damaged."

After Bates had departed, the Cliffs showed us the rest of the house—including the dusty, low-ceilinged attic where Ada had made her discovery. "I notice you didn't mention the daybook in front of the mayor," Simon remarked. "Does he know about it?"

"Only in a vague way," Cliff replied. "Frankly, Mr. Ark, we wanted your opinion before we went public on all the details. I know your reputation for investigating the bizarre. We don't want to be laughed at, and we don't want to yell *witch* about someone who's been dead for more than two centuries."

"You can simply state the facts as you know them," Simon said. "You needn't draw any conclusions. Let the public read this document for what it is."

"Perhaps tomorrow would be a good time to announce the find," Cliff decided. "There'll be some reporters down from Pittsburgh to cover the pageant."

We talked a while longer before deciding to retire. It had been a long drive from New York, and I didn't fight the suggestion that we go to bed at eleven o'clock, even though I rarely turned in before midnight at home. The Cliffs kindly allowed me to phone Shelly back in New York. She was a bit cool at first, as she always was when I went traveling with Simon, but she warmed up quickly enough. After 24 years of marriage neither of us stayed angry very long. Even once when she'd nearly divorced me it hadn't lasted. "Is Simon onto one of his weird cases?" she asked.

"It's hard to say. This thing happened so long ago."

When I finished talking, Simon was already in bed. I took the other bed and turned out the light. "We should sleep well in this country air," I said.

He grunted. "It's like sleeping on the eve of battle."

"You mean tomorrow's pageant? I don't suppose that'll do much damage, not even to Ada Cliff's garden."

"I wouldn't be too sure. Bates was talking about devices to fire arrows into the air."

There was a sudden knock at our bedroom door and Ada Cliff

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came in. "Milo is back again, downstairs. I think he's been drinking and Greg is having some trouble with him. Could you come down?"

"Sure," I agreed, climbing reluctantly out of bed. I heard Simon following, though I doubted that either of us really wanted to get involved. I went quickly down the stairs and found our host with Milo Bates in the front hall. The time was a few minutes before midnight.

"I don't want to go home," Bates was saying, pushing Cliff's hand from his shoulder. "There's nothing for me at home."

Suddenly we heard the breaking of glass from behind the closed door of the family room. Gregory Cliff whirled around. "What's that?" he asked, and even as we were hurrying to the door we heard the scream, brief but chilling.

Cliff opened the door and snapped on the lights. Our eyes went to the broken window, and the figure of a man in Colonial costume slumped on the floor beneath it. His hands were clutched to the knife embedded in his throat. He tried to move, to reach out a hand toward us, but it was a futile gesture. Milo Bates, suddenly sobered by the shocking sight, rushed forward with Cliff. Simon and I followed, while Ada stayed back, hand to her mouth in horror.

"He's dead," Gregory Cliff said, kneeling by the body. "He's been murdered!"

Simon leaned over and pulled the Colonial cap from the head, releasing a mass of long blonde hair. "But it's not a he."

Milo uttered a strangled cry and turned away, sickened.

Cliff stared at the body as if he couldn't believe his eyes. "It's Mary Bates—Milo's wife!"

It was the knife that interested Simon Ark more than the body into which it had been plunged. We hadn't known Mary Bates in life, so her murder didn't affect us with the same shattering force that it struck her husband and the Cliffs. To Simon it was a problem to be solved, and as soon as the state police investigators allowed the knife to be removed from the body and placed in a plastic evidence bag he virtually pounced on it.

"Look at it, my friend. An Indian weapon, surely—and one that's very old. Perhaps it has come to us from the past."

"I'm more interested in where the killer got to in those few seconds it took us to reach the room. Could he have been outside?"

"Doubtful. I believe the knife was hurled from within the room, just as it had been on a previous occasion."

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"You're telling me this is the *same knife* that French colonel hurled at Ned Feebish two and a quarter centuries ago? I don't believe it!"

"Believe what you will," Simon said. "It is an old Indian hunting knife—and you'll notice the letter *M* that has been carved on its hilt."

"M for Muser? No, Simon, I don't buy it. This whole thing is just too pat."

He peered at the knife more closely, and then turned to the state police lieutenant who was handling the investigation. The time was now after two o'clock, but no one had gone back to bed. "Were there any fingerprints on the knife, Lieutenant Falcone?"

"No prints. But if the knife was thrown as you say, I wouldn't expect to find any. It would have been gripped only at the tip of the blade, and that's the part went into her. However, I don't believe we have all the facts here." He was a broad-shouldered, handsome man dressed in civilian clothes, and if the killing had disturbed his night's sleep he showed no sign of it. He knew Gregory Cliff from legal work, and they had shaken hands when he arrived.

"I am certain we don't have all the facts," Simon agreed. "For example, what were we supposed to see, and what did we actually see? Why was Mary Bates dressed up like a man? These matters may be more important than the age of this knife."

The questions, and Simon's whole attitude since his arrival, seemed to intrigue the state police officer. "Are you some sort of investigator?" he asked.

Simon smiled. "I have been known to investigate evidence of the paranormal. Perhaps you would call me a seeker after evil. One day I will surely do battle with Satan himself."

This was a bit too much for Falcone. "Just tell me—are you a detective?"

"I may be of some help on this case."

"Good! I think I'm going to need all the help I can get."

Simon bent to examine the knife again. "In the morning you should get an expert on Indian artifacts to confirm it, but I do believe this is the authentic weapon. It is not a fake."

"How authentic?"

"It is the weapon hurled by a French colonel at the original owner of this farmhouse, in the year 1755."

"You've got to be kidding!"

"It vanished in thin air that night—we have a written account

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of it. An old witch put some sort of spell on it. The knife traveled two hundred and twenty-five years through time, and stabbed this unfortunate woman tonight."

"You got any proof of that?"

"I believe the knife will be our proof."

A uniformed trooper came to the door. "We've been talking to the dead woman's husband, Mayor Bates. You want to question him?"

Falcone nodded. He motioned to Simon and me. "Come along. You might be of some help."

Milo Bates was a battered hulk compared to the man we'd seen earlier in the evening. His eyes were red from sobbing, and his face was twisted into a mask of despair. "I did it," he told us at once. "I'm responsible for her death! This damned pageant was all my idea, and that's what killed her."

"You'd better explain yourself a bit more clearly," Falcone said. "Exactly how are you responsible?"

"The pageant! I suggested the whole thing—restaging the Battle of Lonely Tree and all! In our early plans there was talk of starting it off with the raid on the farmhouse, but then we decided to skip that part. Mary wanted to do it, and she obviously went ahead with her plan without my knowledge. Good lord, how could it have happened?"

"Weren't you at home tonight, Mr. Bates?"

He shook his head. "I was over on Creed's Hill, making sure everything was ready for morning. I'd had a few drinks," he admitted.

"Alone?"

"Some of the time, yes. I'm running this pageant. I wanted to check the arrangements for myself."

"Had your wife given any hint that she might come here dressed as a man tonight?"

"None whatsoever. But when we first planned the pageant she thought we should include the incident at the Cliffs' house. Ada Cliff had found some sort of handwritten account of Colonel Muser's raid, and Mary thought we should act it out."

Simon Ark interrupted with a question. "Were you aware that the original resident of this house was thought to be a witch?"

"I guess I'd heard talk. But after two centuries what difference did that make?"

"Mr. Bates"—Simon looked at him levelly—"your wife may have been killed by an Indian hunting knife thrown in 1755 and somehow

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propelled through time to the present day."

"What?" He stared at Simon as if at a madman. "You can't believe that!"

"I don't say I believe it. I only say it is one possibility. If Colonel Muser's account is reliable, his knife somehow vanished that night. Where did it go, and where has it been all these years?"

"Ask Gregory Cliff," Bates lost his control. "It's his house!"

"What were the relations between your wife and the Cliffs?" Lieutenant Falcone asked.

"We were friendly, all four of us. Cliff is my attorney, and I did some landscape work here at the house. We see each other socially."

"No animosity?"

"Why would you think that?"

"Your outburst of a moment ago implied that Gregory Cliff might be a sore point."

"I—*you'll have to excuse me. I can't think straight with what's* happened to Mary."

"Of course," Falcone replied. "I think that'll be all for the present, Mr. Bates. We'll be in touch."

But as the youthful mayor was leaving the room, Simon asked, "Will the pageant go on as scheduled?"

Milo Bates nodded. "But without me, I'm afraid. My heart's gone out of it."

When he had left, the state police investigator settled back in his chair. "Now suppose we go over the whole thing one more time."

I finally got to bed and drifted into a fitful sleep shortly before six o'clock, only to be awakened a few hours later by the sound of a booming cannon. It took me a moment to remember where I was, and another moment to remember the pageant. Obviously the mock battle between the British and the French had begun.

I slid out of bed and discovered that Simon was already at the window watching them. "Ah, my friend, you're awake."

"How could I sleep through cannons? What time is it, anyway?"

"Just nine o'clock. They seem to be right on schedule."

We dressed and went downstairs where Ada was preparing a quick breakfast. "Nothing fancy, I'm afraid," she apologized. "After last night it's a wonder I can make a cup of coffee. Greg and I were awake all night."

And her husband, when he appeared, was red-eyed and irritable. "They're behaving like a bunch of overgrown boys, running around

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out there with their muskets and arrows! Most of them aren't even from town—they've come here from all over the state! And even from Maryland and West Virginia."

"Sit down and eat your breakfast, Greg."

He stared at his plate, blinking his eyes as if it was difficult to focus them. "You seem to forget there was a killing in this house last night, Ada. I can't just carry on as if nothing happened! Mary Bates was a friend of ours."

"Greg, we have guests."

The reminder seemed to surprise him. He turned to Simon and me with a half-hearted smile. "Sorry. Did you sleep well?"

"The cannon woke us," I admitted.

"Well, after breakfast I'll show you around the battle scene. We have a couple of clever special effects, like a machine for firing rubber-tipped arrows, that add to the authenticity."

A machine for firing arrows didn't sound very authentic to me, but I let it pass. "The newspapers may be more interested in the real killing here than in the mock battle out there," I pointed out.

"We're closing the house," Cliff decided. "We can't have it open to the public after what's happened."

"Of course not," Ada quickly agreed.

When we went out after breakfast a few people had already gathered on the road, looking and pointing toward the house. Gregory Cliff explained that the police had requested the public not be admitted. It was a lie, but an acceptable one under the circumstances. We followed the attorney around the side of the garden, where I noticed that no snow fence had been erected after all. Ahead, at the edge of a small woods, a handful of men dressed as Indians were loading arrows into some sort of device. Three or four others could be seen nearby.

"Look here," Cliff said. "It's my own invention. The French and Indians might have won the war if they'd had it. Basically it's a modification of the traps used to launch clay targets in skeet shooting. The arrow is placed in this groove, the arm pulled back against the spring until it locks, and when the cord is pulled—"

He demonstrated as he spoke, and the spring-propelled arm swung instantly in a half circle, propelling the arrow upward at an angle. We watched it travel about 250 feet before it curved back to earth. "Just rubber tips, of course," Cliff said, showing off one of the arrows. "We don't want anyone injured."

"Why not use bows?" I asked. "Seems it would be just as fast."

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"Even with rubber-tipped arrows we felt there'd be a danger in having inexperienced people running around using bows. You can see the spectators wander quite close. The muskets are using powder only—no balls—and by firing the arrows with these modified traps we can exactly control their flight path and landing area. It gives the effect of arrows flying through the air without any danger at all to spectators or participants."

While we spoke I noticed that Simon seemed unusually interested in the device.

"Can the elevation be regulated?" he asked.

"Certainly." Cliff demonstrated it for us. "It's really just like a skeet trap. All I had to do was make certain it would hold the arrow. We're using a dozen of them here today."

Someone came running up with a problem, pointing out that spectators were edging near the garden area. Cliff sighed. "Guess I'll have to put up that snow fence after all."

A group in British Colonial uniforms ran by us, chasing Indians. "That one looks like he's supposed to be George Washington," I remarked.

Cliff nodded. "Washington took part in the battle, but he was a bit younger-looking than that. Excuse me, will you? I have to see about the snow fence."

Simon waited till the arrows had been fired and then picked up one of the traps, moving it on its heavy metal base until it was pointed at a nearby tree. He caught one of the Indians running by. "Here, let me borrow that knife for a minute," he asked.

"Be careful of it. I borrowed it from my son." The man smiled behind his Indian warpaint.

Simon knelt to place the knife on the arm of the trap, then pulled back against the spring to cock it. When he released the cord the knife was propelled at a slight upward angle, striking the tree about four feet off the ground. The impact at this close range was enough to drive the blade into the trunk.

"Good, good!" Simon was pleased with himself.

"You think that's how she was killed?"

"Let us return to the house and see, my friend."

"Do you think Cliff—"

"Do not jump to conclusions," he cautioned.

We went at once to the family room, where Simon stood in the approximate position occupied by Mary Bates when the knife hit her. We both said it at the same instant. "The fireplace!"

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It was a large gaping hole, lower than the level of a person's neck, but we'd seen the trap adjusted to fire upward at any angle. "The screen is closed," I pointed out.

"But it could have been open last night." He bent to open it now and looked inside. The random pattern of ashes had been disturbed, and there were unmistakable traces of something having rested in the dust. "I think so," Simon said softly. "I really think so."

That was when Ada came into the room with Lieutenant Falcone. "I thought I heard you. The lieutenant's been looking for you."

Falcone was obviously excited. "You were right, damn it! I had somebody from the University check out this knife. It's Eighteenth Century, without a doubt. That's enough to start me believing in the supernatural!"

"Too bad," I said. "Simon was about to demonstrate how the killing could have been worked by quite natural means."

"What?"

"With one of the modified skeet traps being used to hurl arrows," Simon explained. "It could have been hidden here in the fireplace, and aimed at a proper elevation to hit the throat of anyone who tripped the cord."

Lieutenant Falcone smiled. "This is the first time I've met one of you hot-shot investigators. I'll admit we don't get many supernatural killings out this way, but I'd believe in the supernatural as quickly as I'd believe in a mechanical device for hurling a knife at someone's throat. How would the machine know the height of the victim?"

"The machine wouldn't, but the person who set it would."

"And what happened to the cord and trap after the killing? None of you mentioned noticing them."

"We didn't look for anything like that," Simon said. "We especially didn't look in the fireplace."

"The fireplace?"

"Let us bring one of the traps down from the hill and I'll demonstrate."

A skeptical Falcone helped me carry one into the house and set it deep inside the large fieldstone fireplace. Simon cocked the arm and placed a small steak knife in position. We placed a board on a chair to represent the target. Then Simon ran a cord from the triggering mechanism. "Ready?" he asked.

"Ready," I responded, moving well out of the way.

He tugged the cord and the arm shot forward, propelling the knife

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up from the fireplace toward the board. It hit, clung momentarily, and then fell to the floor. "Satisfied it could be done?" Simon asked Falcone.

"Maybe," he admitted. "But that cord would have been seen."

"A thin wire would do the job and remain virtually invisible."

"What about that?"

He pointed to the released throwing arm of the skeet trap, now in its forward position, clearly visible in the fireplace opening. "He's right, Simon," I agreed. "Why didn't we notice it?"

But Simon Ark was not to be sidetracked by our objections. "I agree that it's visible, but you'll note that the arm does not extend beyond the fireplace opening. If I close the screen—like this—the incriminating device all but disappears from view."

"The screen must have been closed in those first few minutes," I agreed, "while our attention was diverted by the body."

"There were five of you who entered the room together," Falcone observed. "You two, Mr. and Mrs. Cliff, and Milo Bates."

Simon nodded. "And I am prepared to name the murderer, and to tell you what happened on the night two and a quarter centuries ago when Colonel Muser hurled his knife."

It took us a while to gather them together, and when we did the mock battle was still raging on the distant hill. We could see the smoke from the cannons drifting slowly over the landscape as Simon Ark stood before the windows and began his explanation.

"Our problem, if we accept the murder weapon as a genuine Eighteenth Century Indian knife, is its location during the intervening two hundred and twenty-five years. I have studied the handwritten account left by Colonel Muser, describing the events in this room on that fateful night—the eve of the Battle of Lonely Tree. You're all familiar with it. You know that, by Colonel Muser's account, the knife he hurled at Ned Feebish seemed to vanish into thin air when the man's mother shouted a curse of some sort from the doorway. What happened to that knife? Did it really travel through time to kill Mary Bates in this room last night?"

Gregory Cliff and his wife exchanged glances, while Milo Bates shifted uneasily in his chair. No one spoke.

"I have already demonstrated to Lieutenant Falcone here," Simon continued, "how the knife could have been fired in this room last night—fired from a skeet trap like those that were modified for the mock battle today. But the real mystery remained. What fate befell

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the knife all those years ago? If it did not vanish as a result of a witch's curse, what happened to it? Well, Colonel Muser hurled it, in a darkened room. The knife disappeared and though he searched the room in the morning he could not find it. In the dark it's reasonable to assume he might have missed his target, but where did the knife go? Remember now two things about his account: he'd broken a window to gain entrance to the house, and Ned Feebish was silhouetted against the window when the French officer hurled the knife."

"The window!" Ada gasped. "Of course!"

"Of course," Simon agreed. "It's the only possibility. The colonel, perhaps unnerved by the unexpected shout of the old woman, missed the young man's head and the knife went through the broken window. In the dark he never would have noticed it. It landed out there on the ground, and was probably trampled and buried during the following day's battle activities."

"Then how did it reappear?" Falcone wanted to know.

"It was found, of course. Dug up when the present garden was put in. And who was it who put in that garden for the Cliffs?"

Gregory's mouth had dropped open. "It was—"

Simon nodded. "Milo Bates."

Milo was out of his chair. "No! I didn't kill her! You can't say I did it! I loved her!"

But Lieutenant Falcone already had his handcuffs out.

Later, as they were leaving for town with Milo Bates in the state police car, Simon found time to speak with Falcone. "I think we've got a case," the detective said. "It would have been easy enough for him to talk his wife into the stunt, and he could have rigged the trap for her to spring. He hasn't broken yet, but a few hours of questioning should do it. And we have you to thank."

"Yes," Simon agreed with a sigh. "You have me to thank."

We watched the state police car pull away and I asked, "What is it, Simon? What's wrong?" I'd known him long enough to catch the nuances of his mood.

"My friend, I've just sent an innocent man to prison. It's not something I do lightly."

"Innocent! But I thought—"

"Let us go back inside. The battle, I see, is almost over."

The smoke from the cannons had cleared on the hill, and the men in their British and French and Indian costumes were coming back

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from their games. Someone had started singing an old English carol and others along the line of march took up the tune. Ada Cliff came out on the porch to watch them as we mounted the steps.

"A colorful sight, isn't it?" I said.

"It certainly is! To think that Milo Bates planned it all and then didn't get to see it. I still can't bring myself to believe that he killed poor Mary."

"The ways of the human heart are strange indeed," Simon remarked.

He was staring at her and I could see it made her uneasy. "Is that remark meant for me?" she asked.

"It is," Simon replied. "You see, I expected you to confess when I accused your lover of murdering his wife."

"Lover! What are you talking about? Are you insane?"

"You set the death trap for Mary Bates, Ada. There was never any weapon out of time because that entire account by Colonel Muser was a crude hoax."

"That's not true!"

"Yes, it is. First, there was no old-fashioned spelling in the journal entry, and if it had really been written in 1755, there would have been Eighteenth Century usage and flavor. Second, there was one glaring error. A Frenchman like Muser might well have used the French word *silhouette*, but he couldn't have used it in 1755. The word came from the surname of Etienne de Silhouette, the French finance minister for a brief eight months in 1757. His taxation program proved so unpopular that the public attached his name to the little shadow portraits of the time, indicating the shadowy and unsubstantial nature of his financial policies. So you see the word itself simply didn't exist prior to 1757."

She closed her eyes and steadied herself. "Why would I make it up?"

"Why? I believe you found that journal while cleaning the attic. That much was true. I believe you found the old knife at the same time. The idea came to you to use it to kill Mary Bates, your rival for Milo's affections. You invented Muser's account and wrote it in the old journal yourself, using what was known of actual history. It wasn't difficult to persuade Mary to don a Colonial costume and break the window to gain entry to the house. She'd wanted to be part of her husband's pageant and was looking for a way. You set a thin wire where she'd be sure to hit it coming through the window. By chance Milo had arrived at the same time and roused us all.

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That must have given you a fright. Of course the knife might have missed her or only wounded her, but that was a gamble you were willing to take."

"Why me?" she asked. "Why not Greg or Milo?"

"The killer had to be able to yank in the wire and close the fireplace screen in those first moments after we entered the room. Both men ran to the body but you held back, afraid to look. That's when you closed the screen behind our backs."

"But . . . you knew about Milo and me?"

"That you were lovers? It was only a guess, based on a glance exchanged when you urged him into a chair last night. But I have come to notice such things, and to weigh their import. Tell me something—would you have killed your husband too, in order to be with Milo?"

"Greg would have divorced me. He wasn't the problem."

"Then I repeat my first statement. I expected you to confess when I accused Milo Bates of the killing. You must have known when you lured me here with that fake journal entry that I would investigate the killing, that I would try to fix the blame."

"I expected you to bolster the supernatural angle," she admitted. "If Milo hadn't arrived when he did last night, I would have gone downstairs first when the window was broken. I'd have made sure she was dead, and hidden the trap before I raised the alarm. I wanted a house full of witnesses."

"And Milo?" Simon asked quietly.

She was silent for a moment, staring off at the hill where the battle was ended and the warriors gone. "No," she said at last. "Milo won't have to take the blame. I'll tell them everything."

Later, as Simon and I drove back across the hills toward home, I said, "There was nothing for you in this case, Simon. No witches or magic. If old Nora Feebish really was a witch we found no evidence of it."

"But perhaps we did, my friend. Perhaps the strongest evidence of all was the fate that befell those who lived in her house. Perhaps her real curse was the love she brought to Ada Cliff and Milo Bates."

I had no answer for that.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT L. FISH

PREFATORY NOTE BY MR. FISH: *"What constitutes a crime, and who is to judge? Dostoyevski said, in* THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD, *'With ready made opinions, one cannot judge of crime.'*

"We know that destroying a valuable work of art is a crime—but what about destroying a valuable friendship? Or a man's faith in his fellow man?

"And if these be crimes, as they surely are, what is more apt than that the punishment fit the crime?"

PUNISHMENT TO FIT THE CRIME

by ROBERT L. FISH

He was my best friend—damn him! But I got even . . .

I'd better begin at the beginning. Jack Burnham had been my best friend since we were little kids, since the day, in fact, when I stopped a bigger kid from beating Jack up in the schoolyard. It was true that Jack had swiped this kid's pencil box, but that didn't seem to me to be reason enough for the bigger kid to try to take Jack's head off. But throughout our school careers that's what other kids tried to do, usually for similar reasons. Jack never learned to respect other people's property. It kept me busy keeping him from being murdered. But I suppose it wasn't his fault if he hated to buy something he could swipe, or if he wouldn't spend a dime if he could get someone else to spend it; it was just the way he was, the way he had been born. And people can't help that; I understood that.

In college I was lucky enough to get a job after classes, something Jack didn't happen to manage; so of course I had to cover most of

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the expenses when we ate away from the dormitory, or whenever we went out on a rare double-date. But I didn't mind. After all, that's what friends are for, aren't they? And I certainly didn't get angry with either Jack or Noreen when Noreen came to me after graduation and said she wanted to break our engagement, that she had decided Jack was a better bet than I was. Well, after all, you can't dictate love, or desire for security, or anything else; I understood that well enough.

After that we sort of went different ways, Jack to New York and a job in the brokerage firm that Noreen's father was president of, and me to the west coast and after a rather checkered career, into the TV writing business. We corresponded regularly, though, and we spoke on the phone whenever I felt flush enough to stand the phone charges—both Noreen and Jack loved to reminisce whenever I called. So, as I say, we kept in touch, and I still considered him my best friend—in fact, I considered the two of them my best friends.

And of course after I hit with the TV series, "Mugger's Lane," I was able to get to New York with greater frequency, and was able to take the two of them out to dinner, and to buy them a nice housewarming gift when they moved into the new big house on the sound in Mamaroneck next to the Yacht Club. I recall we would sit out on the wide porch and sip the Remy Martin I had brought as we remembered some of the scrapes we had got into as kids and remarked on how successful we had both become, but mainly Jack, who was now vice-president of the brokerage firm and slated soon to take over the top job on his father-in-law's retirement.

I never told Jack about the novel I was trying to write. I guess all TV writers, TV producers, even the office boys and stenographers in TV studios, hope some day to write the Great American Novel, to launch them into a more respectable area of the communications sphere. But chiefly TV writers, even—or possibly mainly—the successful ones. They dream of the day when the world will grant them the accolades accorded the Hemingways and the Faulkners, or even the Haleys and the Wallaces; the day when they can throw off the restrictive shackles and emerge into the light of freedom from the small dark cells where they pound out their lives on ancient Remingtons in some Ulcer Alley in one studio or another. They fantasize of the day when they can put their earnings into blue-chip stocks and gilt-edged bonds, rather than into providing those same earnings to some psychiatrist to help them maintain their sanity.

I didn't tell Jack because I wasn't sure the book would ever be

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published, assuming it was ever written. There is nothing quite as pitiful in this world as being asked what you do for a living and when you reply that you're a writer, being asked if you were ever published. No, better to say nothing. But I could not help but picture the day when, a copy of my novel in one hand and a rave review from John Leonard in the other—and my name being written across the heavens by skywriters—I would appear at Mamaroneck and receive praise from those from whom it would mean so much more than from anyone else—my best friends.

Someone once said that everyone wants to have written a novel, rather than to write one, but in time I actually managed to finish the book, and it was even published. The critics gave it fine reviews—and it sold about 400 copies, as best I could determine. But that all meant nothing; I hadn't written the book for money. The important thing was that I had written a book, that I held a copy in my hand, and that I was on my way to Mamaroneck with a copy for Jack and Noreen, expecting to be properly praised, if only for exhibiting the discipline necessary to complete writing a novel. And, if I must add my voice to those of the reviewers, it wasn't a bad book.

The reaction I received was all and more than I expected—high praise, back-slapping, a kiss on the cheek from Noreen, a hearty two-handed handshake from Jack, with all the sincerity in the world in his eyes. Jack even broke out a bottle of fairly decent Scotch to celebrate. The two of them kept congratulating me on the imagination and talent necessary to have written a novel, a thing Jack confessed he could never do. They leaned over me affectionately as I carefully inscribed the flyleaf with: "To Jack and Noreen Burnham, my oldest and best friends, and the best friends a person could have," and signed it with a flourish. Noreen said the book would hold the place of honor on their book shelves; and I don't believe I ever felt as good about writing the book, or about anything else, as I did that moment. Until my next visit, when I noticed the book was missing, and Jack laughed as he put his arm around my shoulder.

"Leave that book out where one of our thieving friends might hook it?" he said, and shook his head. "No, that book is in my safety-deposit vault. It's too valuable to us to take any chances with." Then, I think, I felt even better.

I wrote a second novel, not a very good one I'm afraid, that was never published, and after that I started TV writing-producing, rather than just writing, and there just didn't seem to be time to do

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much of anything except my job. I slowly became reconciled to the fact that I was going to be a one-book author. But at least, I told myself, the one book had been a good one, even if it hadn't sold; how many people hadn't written any books at all in their lives? Many, many, many. The thought gave me a certain satisfaction, but not much; my major satisfaction remained in recalling the reception I had received when I gave Jack and Noreen their inscribed copy. Just remembering it always made me feel warm, made me grin.

I had to be in New York on a sudden call not long afterward, and after my business was completed I thought I'd drop in on Jack and Noreen. I started to phone them and then paused, thinking how much more fun it would be to drop in and surprise them; there had never been the slightest formality in our relationship. It was a lovely spring day, I had a rented car, and I figured the drive up to Mamaroneck would be pleasant, even if I found them out. So off I went.

To my disappointment they were out. Jack and Noreen, the housekeeper told me, were in Europe for a vacation and would not be back for about three weeks. So there I was in Mamaroneck with a full day ahead of me and with nothing to do. I drove back into the center of the small town, parked the car in front of a coffee shop, and got down to have a cup of coffee before starting back to New York. Then I paused, because next to the coffee shop there was a second-hand bookstore.

I must tell you why I paused. I'm not a collector of books, myself, but some of my friends are. In particular, I have a friend who lives in San Diego, a man named Ned Guymon who at one time had collected what was and is considered the finest and most valuable collection of rare first editions and original manuscripts relating to the mystery field that the world has ever seen, a collection that today is housed at Occidental College in California. A book that Ned has often mentioned as being one he had never been able to even find, let alone own, is a book titled *Andrewlina*, by J. S. Fletcher, and I am sure that all of Ned's many friends, whenever they are near a second-hand bookstore, drop in for the one-in-a-billion chance that they might run across a copy of the rare book and give it to Ned, for we all know how pleased it would make him. And so, being near a second-hand bookstore in a town where the chances were few collectors would normally seek rarities, I stopped in.

The place was large and well-lit as most second-hand bookstores are, quite contrary to the impression most people have of such places

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as being gloomy warrens ankle-deep in dust. The proprietor at the moment was not present and I set about examining the stock. The books, as in a few such stores, were not arranged in alphabetical order, but were set in shelves that ran the length of the store and up to the ceiling, on both sides of narrow aisles. Fortunately, fiction was separated from nonfiction, and I patiently began my search at the fiction shelves, my head turned to read the titles, and beginning to get a stiff neck as I inched my way along the aisle.

And then I suddenly smiled. A copy of my own opus was here! With a grin I withdrew the book and opened it to the flyleaf to see what price the proprietor had placed on a used copy of my work. And got the shock of my life, my smile frozen on my face like an idiot rictus. There, before me in my own handwriting, were the words: "To Jack and Noreen Burnham—" and all the rest of the florid, insipid inscription. A bit of a shock, to say the least.

I carried the book to the front of the store and waited until the proprietor appeared from the basement, dusting his hands.

"This book," I said, and my voice sounded strange to my ears, as if I were listening to someone else speak. "Is there any way you can tell where you bought it, or from whom?"

"At times, but rarely," he said. "We buy from many sources, from bookstores with overstocks, from the libraries of estates, from garage sales, from church sales, or from people who just come in with a suitcase full of old books they're sure are worth a fortune. And rarely are. However, sometimes we mark them. Let me see."

He took the book from me and opened it to look at the inside of the back cover. A small mark there seemed to tell him something; he looked up, smiling.

"I remember this one, not because of the book itself, but because I bought quite a few at the same time at the same place, all of no particular value, although the way the man argued you'd have thought they were first-editions of Poe. At a garage sale. One of those posh places down on the sound, next to the yacht club, as a matter of fact." He shook his head in nonunderstanding. "You wouldn't expect a garage sale at a place like that, would you?"

"No," I said, and then wondered what made me say it. I bought the book for $1.25, the price marked on the flyleaf above my inscription.

That was two weeks ago. I have spent the time between then and now trying to think up a proper punishment for Jack Burnham, and

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it only came to me this morning. A simple recrimination would never do; I wanted a chastening, a retribution that was fitting, something that would do to him what he had done to me by selling my book for a paltry sum, probably a half dollar or so. It makes me smile when I think of my solution to the problem, but there is little humor in the smile, and a good deal of bitterness.

Jack and Noreen should be home from Europe in about a week. And when he gets back he'll find a letter from me. It will read:

"Dear Jack:

"Congratulate me! Bring out the beer and pretzels, strike up the band! This is going to make you happy. Happy? Overjoyed!

"Remember that one book I managed to squeeze out of my system? The one that got good reviews and then managed to disappear from the face of the earth? Well, believe it or not, one of the top film producers read it somewhere—he doesn't remember exactly where, but he thinks it might have been in Asia on a trip there to check locations, can you believe it?—he didn't bring the book back, and God knows where it is now. Anyway, he called me up and wants to buy it for the movies. And for a sum, my friend—for ig-bay, ough-day—that would curl your hair. And on top of that, I'm going to do the script, the screenplay. For *more* dough. Can you imagine?

"There is one small problem, though; fortunately an easily surmountable one. I don't have a single copy of the blasted book, and the publisher went out of business not long after he published it—maybe that was the reason (don't *say* that!). I've checked libraries and written all around, and my magnum-opus is now a non-magnum-opus, so to speak. But I remembered the copy I inscribed to you and Noreen, the one you keep in your safety-deposit box.

"Lucky you kept that copy, pal. Now it's worth its weight in gold. Gold, hell! Rubies, emeralds, diamonds, you name it. I know how much you value that copy, but a xerox will do fine. Be sure and include in the xerox the inscription on the flyleaf; I want to impress on the producer that I actually know Jack Burnham.

"And another thing—you and I and Noreen have been friends for a long, long time; you know I never married and I have no responsibilities. So my idea is we split everything the movie earns for me—which is going to be moola, pal—*moola!* Such as in the dreams of sultans and such-like folk. The producer is talking about a fifteen million dollar budget, and my—I mean *our*—share of that should be enough to keep the wolf a league or so away from the door for a long, long spell.

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"So shoot the bookie to me, cookie, and we'll all be rich. That's about all the news, but what more could anyone want? Love to Noreen, and all the best."

And I signed with my fanciest flourish.

I wonder what he'll do? Suicide is possible but unfortunately, not very probable. A nervous breakdown is both possible and probable. An ulcer at the very least.

Jack should never have said he put the book in a safety-deposit box; a fire would have handled the problem if it had been kept on his bookshelf. Or a theft by a visitor. Or many things. But a fire in his safety-deposit box? Or a theft there? Hardly. Poor Jack, he really has little imagination.

But I have plenty. I'm a writer, remember, Jack?

DETECTIVERSE

NET LOSS

by MARK GRENIER

With a fishnet, a fisher named Lime
Strangled seventeen girls at one time.
  Now the cops have a bet
  That, to get back his net,
He'll return to the seine of the crime.

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a *NEW* Uncle Abner story by

JOHN F. SUTER

Let us hear another voice in praise of Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner. In his Introduction to THE GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES (1927), *Willard Huntington Wright, better known as S. S. Van Dine, wrote: "Uncle Abner is one of the outstanding characters of detective fiction, deserving to be ranked with that immortal triumvirate, Dupin, Lecoq and Holmes."*

Here, then, is the second of Mr. Suter's pastiches of Uncle Abner, the Virginia squire of Jeffersonian times, the prophet among men who can say, "I was not there, but I saw the truth" . . .

THE ANGEL'S HAIR

by JOHN F. SUTER

Sometimes, when I read the Book of Job, I find my memory pushing Job aside in favor of my Uncle Abner. My uncle was never tormented in the way that poor man of old was. My feeling is that the Lord would never have issued to Abner the mighty series of reminders of His majesty which he did to Job. Abner already knew them all and honored the Lord for them.

Yet, a romantic man he was not. He was aware of the colors of the autumn leaves, but it was because they told him something: the identity of each tree. He knew the odor of violets and sweet clover, for these identified the plants.

Most of all, he respected the insignificant, for the Lord was as infinite in patience as He was mighty in colossal works.

When I was only seven, my mother took me with her to visit a cousin who lived a short day's journey from us toward Ohio. She had promised the woman, Sarah Harrison, that she would spend a week

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caring for her and her household when the Harrisons' first child was born. I had to go, too, for my father had skill enough to fend for himself, but little in caring for a seven-year-old.

It was mid-February and biting cold when we alighted from the stage just a mile from the Harrison farm. The journey had been bumpy, over many a frozen rut. Often the road passed cliffs hung top to bottom with huge icicles, and small waterfalls were locked in irregular, bulgy, glassy sheets. Snow lay unbroken on fields and hillsides.

Now, a week later, a change in the weather had come, but not everyone at our cousins' welcomed it.

"There will be no more skating on the pond after tomorrow if this warm spell holds," said Cousin Levi, Sarah's brother, coming into the kitchen through the back door. He hung a pair of skates on a nail in a far corner. "I'd best get it out of my system for this winter."

Sarah's husband, Adam, interrupted his conversation in the sitting room. "More'll get done around here when that happens," he said, raising his voice.

His visitor was my Uncle Abner, who had come here on his way back from a farm on the Ohio. He had been inspecting some pigs he was considering buying, and he had stopped to accompany my mother and me home.

"I have mixed feelings about a thaw," I heard him say. "A good thaw and at least one more hard freeze, and the ground will turn that much easier."

"That it will," my cousin agreed.

"On the other hand," Abner went on, "there might be mud under the coach wheels when we go home day after tomorrow. It might be a hard pull at times."

My mother and Cousin Sarah made no attempt to enter into the conversation. Sarah was nursing my little cousin, Jonathan, while my mother busily peeled potatoes for dinner.

I did not like the change in the weather. The snow was disappearing fast, and there were little pools of icy water all over the yard. I was not allowed to play outdoors under such conditions.

I envied my Cousin Levi. He sounded as though he enjoyed himself. I hoped that I might be like him when I was 22, his age. Just now, all I could do was sit and listen. Most of what I heard was family history between the women. I could make little of what Uncle Abner and Cousin Adam said to each other.

Cousin Levi loosened his rust-red woolen scarf, then reached into

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one of the pockets of his heavy coat. He laid an object on the kitchen table. "Look at that," he said, and went to hang up his things in the back hall.

My mother and Cousin Sarah both rose from their chairs to examine the thing. I put out a hesitant finger to touch it. "What is it?" my mother asked.

It looked like a rock, but it was all glittery. I had never seen gold, but the descriptions I had heard fit this object. It was yellow, and it threw back light when it was turned.

Only one thing about it had never been described. It looked like a collection of square and rectangular cubes sticking out in several directions.

"Gold?" asked Cousin Sarah.

"It's gold," I said, positive now that someone else had voiced it.

Levi came back and picked up the object. "Let's see what the rest of them say."

He took the thing in to the men. I went to the doorway to watch as he handed it around.

My uncle lifted the object in his hand. He shook his head.

"I have never seen such a thing," he said, pulling at his bushy beard. "I have handled gold, but it had already been refined and made into coins or other objects. I have no idea what the crude ore resembles." He passed it to Adam.

Cousin Adam was 24 and big enough to have given Abner a hard contest if the two had ever come to blows. He was broad-shouldered and thick-armed. One could almost imagine him plowing a field alone, if his horse or mule were too sick to pull.

The lump of ore seemed tiny in his huge hand. "Gold," he said. "It must be gold. Where did it come from? Did you find much of it?"

Cousin Levi chuckled. "You know those two tracts of land that were willed to us, one to Sarah, one to me? On mine there's a deadfall of old trees and bushes up against a ledge. I was clearing it away, and I found a hole going back under the ledge. I kindled a pine knot and crawled in. I found this and a lot more."

"Then we'll be rich," Adam said, fingering the ore.

Levi chuckled again. "I might get us a little money from it, but not in the way you think. No, that's not gold. I once saw a piece of it owned by an iron miner from Pennsylvania. He says it's a form of iron, and they call it fool's gold."

Uncle Abner listened with interest. "I have heard others speak of it, but this is the first I've seen. You think you can get money

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from it? How—by mining iron?"

Levi shook his head. "It does not look that abundant. But have you ever heard of the lost Indian silver mine? They say it's in these hills somewhere."

"Yes," my uncle said, "and I neither believe nor disbelieve in it. However, I choose to get my living from the top of the earth, not from deep inside it."

"I might look for it for a little while," said Levi, "if I had an idea where to try." He turned to Adam. "Right after I came away with this, I encountered Eli Rumbaugh. He believes in the mine. They tell me he's been obsessed for years with wanting to find it himself. I told him that I had found it, but that it was gold, not silver. He wanted to buy my land, right away."

"Did you agree to sell?" Adam asked.

"No," grinned Levi, "I told him that I would not sell in my lifetime. He might make Sarah an offer if I should die, since it will go to her, but I could never bring myself to give it up."

"If it were truly gold, you would be a fool to sell," Uncle Abner said.

Levi shrugged. "Eli claimed that it would take money to develop it. He would be able to take that risk. There is some truth in that."

"Does he know that you think this is not gold?" Adam asked.

"No, I have let him continue to believe in the mine," Levi replied.

"Then," said Adam, "if it should be gold, you have wealth. I am not convinced that it is iron, in spite of what you say. But, if it only looks like gold, sell him the land, anyway. You could get a good price if he thinks it is valuable."

Levi shook his head. He had a shock of pale yellow hair, and some of it fell close to his eyes. "I can't do business that way."

Cousin Sarah was listening to the discussion, and it was plain, even to me, that she could sense an argument.

"Ah," she said, "all of that is underground, where it's dark and damp. Let me show you a real treasure."

She went upstairs, where I heard the sound of a chest being opened and closed. When she came back, she was carrying a piece of cloth. She handed it first to my mother.

The cloth was rose-colored, and it shimmered. My mother saw my curiosity and let me touch it gently. It was soft and exciting to feel.

"It is silk," Sarah murmured, as she passed it around carefully. "Cousin Jane Hall sent it to me as a present, to make a dress. She would not tell me what it cost, but I did learn that it is expensive."

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"Where did she get it?" my mother asked.

"There is a mill in New England making the cloth," Sarah replied. "I have not heard where they get the thread. They say it had to come from the Far East."

Adam looked at Uncle Abner and smiled. "Imagine—they say that a worm produces the threads. Do you believe that?"

"The Lord has let us learn to get flax from a plant and wool from an animal," my uncle said. "It is no marvel to me that He has permitted a worm to give us such a thing."

Sarah detected a loose thread on the face of the cloth. She gently lifted it away and held it up. "See how fine it is!"

My mother touched it. "It is like an angel's hair," she said.

While all the men were looking at the thread, I asked Cousin Sarah, "What will you do with the angel's hair?"

"I don't know," she laughed. "It is too small to use." She saw my eagerness and smiled. She was already a pretty woman, fair as her brother. The smile turned her, for an instant, into the angel of my imagination. "Here," she said, putting the thread into my hand, "you may have it, Martin. Dream of heaven when you go to sleep."

Until just before bedtime I played with two things: Levi's shining rock and the shimmery thread. In the end, my mother's urging, backed up by my uncle's gruff discipline, sent me off to bed.

But I did not take either plaything with me. I left the rock on the kitchen table. With the perverse illogic of small boys, I wrapped the silk thread around the blade of one of Levi's skates.

The next day was fair and mild, and the thawing continued. As I had feared, I was not allowed to go out. The morning was slow for me because I got little attention from anyone. Adam was out hacking brush somewhere, heaping it up in piles for burning when early spring came. My mother and Sarah were busy with housework and the baby. Uncle Abner had borrowed a horse from Adam to look at more pigs, at Adam's suggestion.

Cousin Levi might have given me a few minutes, but I did not know where he was. He was sleeping in a corner of the barn's hayloft while Uncle Abner was visiting, but I was not allowed to go even that far from the house. Besides, his skates were gone, and I supposed he had gone to the farm pond for one more time.

Shortly before noon I heard the sound of hoofs picking carefully through the mud. In a few moments I heard footsteps, the sound of the bootscraper being used, and Uncle Abner opened the kitchen door. He merely looked in.

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"Sarah," he said in a tone of urgency, "is Adam here?"

She glanced at the clock. "He should be coming in at any minute. Is something wrong?"

"Perhaps," my uncle replied. "The ice is broken on your pond, as though someone had fallen in. It will take at least two of us and some boards to find out."

"Levi!" she cried. "It couldn't be Levi. He sometimes takes ventures, but he always knows what he's doing."

Abner could see that she was of no help, so he said, "I must look for Adam, or some other help if any should be near." He closed the door.

I went to the window and watched him walk to and fro, looking to see if Adam were in sight. Evidently this was fruitless, for he went through the yard to the front. There his luck was better. A tall thin man was just passing on horseback.

"I need help," I heard Abner say. "Come with me to look for boards in the barn."

"I'll help anyone," the horseman answered. "Could you tell me why?"

"Certainly," said Abner, "someone might be drowning. Come in quickly."

He opened the gate, and the man rode in, heading for the barn as fast as the horse could safely go on the slippery ground. He had dismounted and was tethering the horse when Uncle Abner caught up with him.

All of us were now watching as the two men disappeared into the barn. I could see Sarah craning her neck in an effort to get a glimpse of Adam, if he should be coming.

At the end of several minutes Uncle Abner and the thin man emerged from the barn. Each of them carried two long planks. They started toward the pond, which was in a small pasture west of the house. The pond was back from the road about a hundred yards. Adam allowed anyone to skate on it who wished.

Abner and the other man had not gone far when Sarah called to them. "I see Adam coming. Shall I tell him anything?"

Abner turned about. "Have him bring rope and a hook, if he has one."

I ran upstairs, where I would have a better view. I saw my uncle and the other man pick their way carefully, for their burden was awkward and footing was treacherous. In a few minutes I heard Sarah calling to Adam, giving him Abner's message.

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Uncle Abner and the thin man reached the pond. I could see the hole he had mentioned, a little bigger than a man, several feet out from the shore and exposed to the sun from the south. I observed Abner putting down his boards, then the other man did the same.

Now Abner picked up one plank and slid it carefully along the ice until the center of the plank was opposite the hole, with half of the wood protruding onto the solid ice. He then did the same with another plank on the opposite side of the hole. When this was done, the thin man crawled along one plank pushing a board, then laid it across the ends of the first two at right angles. He did this again with his second board, forming a square of planks around the hole.

When the thin man was finished, he inched carefully along each of the planks in turn.

"He's looking for someone under the ice," my mother said, behind me.

The thin man shook his head. Uncle Abner turned and looked our way. He had no need to take a long look. Adam, running as best he could, was almost at the pond carrying a coil of rope with a hook on the end.

Uncle Abner held out his hand for the rope, but Adam shook his head. He motioned to the other man, who hesitated, then came back to shore.

"One of them could dive in," my mother said. "Adam has told me the pond is shallow. But it would not be safe. The water is too cold."

I was too young then to realize that extremely cold water would do more than make one shiver badly. I could not know that anyone who had been in the pond that long would never come out of it alive.

Adam inched out on one of the planks, carrying the hook and some of the rope. Uncle Abner and the other man held the rope's other end. When Adam came to the hole, he dropped the hook into the water and let the rope run through his hands until it went slack. Then he pulled it up about a foot.

Slowly and carefully Adam worked his way along the boards. He was about halfway along the second side of the square when he stopped. He began to work the rope from side to side. I heard him shout something to the others. Finally, he pulled straight up on the rope. Clearly, it was not easy to do, but he was doing it.

At last something dark came up from the black water. It looked like a man.

"Martin," said my mother, "turn around. You have seen all that I think you should see."

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Frustrated and curious, I tried to slip away to downstairs, where I might not be noticed, but my mother kept close watch on me.

"They have taken him to the barn door," she said finally, "and laid him in the sun."

"Who? Who is it?" I asked.

"Your Cousin Levi," she answered, and began to shed quiet tears.

Downstairs, Sarah gave an anguished cry and called to my mother to watch the baby. So, in the confusion, I managed to put on my boots and coat. I crossed the yard while Adam, whose clothes dripped water, was holding Sarah back.

I could not see much, for Uncle Abner was examining Levi for signs of life and talking to the thin man. Adam and Sarah were also in the way. I could only see Levi's feet. He must have been trying the ice one last time, for he was wearing his skates.

"He is dead," Abner said finally. "Look, here is a large bruise and cut over his left ear. He must have hit his head on the ice when it broke. That is why he could not pull himself out and escape drowning."

Sarah began to cry uncontrollably. Adam managed to lead her to the kitchen door, where he called to my mother. She came and took Sarah inside.

Uncle Abner straightened and turned around.

"Martin!" he said in surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to get the angel's hair," I said, looking for an excuse.

"The angel's hair? What do you mean?"

I stooped at Levi's foot. "I wrapped it on his skate last night."

My uncle frowned. "So you did. I saw you. Let me get it for you."

He knelt and gently untwined the sheer thread which still encircled the skate. He held it up and examined it.

He stood up, looking first at me, then at the thin man, who reminded me of a woodpecker with his red hair and sharp nose. "Martin," he said, "this is Mr. Rumbaugh. Go into the house, both of you. I must go to the pond for a moment. And Martin—tell Adam not to remove his wet things until I return. Rumbaugh, tell the others to stay inside."

When Rumbaugh and I went in, Sarah was outraged that Abner had permitted Levi's body to remain where it was.

"He doesn't care!" she cried to my mother. "He's Rufus' brother, not yours. No wonder he doesn't care! He's mad! He doesn't even want Adam to put on dry clothes."

"Levi is as much my cousin as you are," my mother replied quietly.

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"Abner does not always show his reasons early, but he is neither heartless nor a fool. Wait before you denounce him."

Wait we did for what seemed a long time, but probably was not. Seconds are minutes to a child, and minutes are hours.

At last Abner returned. Before he came into the house he went to the barn. He reappeared in a moment or two, then came into the house.

"Finally!" Sarah cried. "Will you let us now bring him in and wash him?"

"It is not for me to stop you," Abner replied, not unkindly. "However, do you want me to determine his murderer?"

There were shocked exclamations from everyone. Why, I wondered, should one person kill another? Was it like the Bible story of David and Goliath? But Levi should have been David! He should still be alive!

Abner walked around the room studying everyone except me. He did not even except my mother.

"You have no cause to say such a thing," Adam growled as Abner came to him. "He was a fool to go out on rotten ice, and it broke under him. He hit his head, and he drowned."

"That is the appearance of it," my uncle replied. "He might have drowned, it is true. However, he was hit on the head before he went into the pond. The ice was broken before he went into the water, and he never went out on it on this day."

Rumbaugh heard all this with interest. "You speak as though you saw it all. How is it that you did not intervene? Or were you the one who did it, now trying to throw suspicion somewhere else? Or is it all a made-up tale?"

"Rumbaugh, you ask many questions," said Uncle Abner. "I can reply to all of them with two answers. I saw none of this, because I was not there. It is not a made-up tale, because the one who killed Levi forgot one of the simplest of God's rules."

"Oh, you are a prophet, then," Rumbaugh said, with a smile. "God reveals things to you."

"God reveals to any man who looks and understands what he sees," Abner said. "I was not there, but I saw the truth."

"You saw what took place?" Rumbaugh asked.

"I saw what did not take place," Abner said.

"That it was not an accident?"

"That, above all. But first I saw that Levi's murderer had overlooked a rule which even Martin knows: sharp edges cut."

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"Abner," Adam said, a puzzled look on his big face, "there were no cuts on Levi."

Uncle Abner shook his head. "That was not my meaning. If your brother-in-law had skated on that pond today, he would have left fresh cuts in the ice. In this sunshine they would have water in them. There is a thin sheen of water on the entire face of the ice, but there are no skate marks."

"That is hardly proof," Rumbaugh said, scratching his thin nose. "He was a high-spirited young man. Perhaps in foolishness he sprang from the bank onto the ice, and it broke."

For a moment it looked as though Uncle Abner's patience was at an end. However, when he answered, it was in level tones.

"At that distance he would have needed a fast, running jump to make such a leap onto the ice. He could not do it from muddy ground."

"But there is only your word about the condition of the ice," Rumbaugh said. "By now the sun has melted so much surface that we could not verify it. What made you invent such a tale?"

"It is not invented," Abner said sternly. "It was directed to my attention."

Rumbaugh's sandy brows rose. "By divine revelation?"

"By an innocent child," Abner replied. "By my nephew, Martin."

"A child's fantasy?" sneered Rumbaugh.

"Not a fantasy," my uncle said. "The absence of cuts on the ice was the *second* overlooking of God's simple rule, that sharp edges cut. Martin showed me the first."

Cousin Adam seemed as doubtful as Rumbaugh. "How did he do that?"

Uncle Abner reached into his pocket. "With this." He pulled out the silk thread and stretched it to its length.

"Last night Sarah showed us this thread and gave it to Martin. Before he went to bed, he wrapped it around the blade of one of Levi's skates. When we pulled Levi from the pond, the boy found the thread still on the skate, *uncut*. It could not have resisted even one stroke of the sharp skate."

"Then he *was* murdered," Sarah cried. "Who could have done it?"

"I believe we can find out," Abner said.

Adam gave a slight sneeze. "I'd like to change from these wet clothes," he said.

He had been standing ever since he had come in, and there were damp spots around his feet. I glanced at Eli Rumbaugh, but he was

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wet only at the ends of the sleeves of his heavy coat. He must have carried either Levi's arms or his feet. His only other signs of disarray were a spot of mud on the tail of his coat and a rusty-looking bit of wool caught on a button.

None of us spoke until Adam had changed. He came back wearing work clothing much like that he had removed.

"Now, Abner," he said, "why should anyone want to kill my brother-in-law?"

Adam laughed without humor. "Greed? He owned little. He got by, with the work he did for me, but that was no more than he had to."

"He had land," said Abner.

Adam laughed again. "Land? Put his little bit and Sarah's little bit together, and you still couldn't raise a ruckus, let alone a decent crop."

"His land had something that two of you wanted—a possible Indian mine," Abner said.

Adam shook his head. "That! You heard him say, himself, that it was worthless. I even think you believed him."

"I did believe him. I am not so sure that you did. Was it gold he showed you, or wasn't it?"

"Why," Adam blustered, "it wasn't."

Abner's voice grew stern. "And if it wasn't, it might still be sold to Rumbaugh for the real thing, you suggested. Levi would not do that. Even so, it could still be done, if your wife owned the land. She is her brother's heir."

Adam's face grew red, and his huge fists bunched. "I'll call you to account," he growled.

Uncle Abner did not even pale. "You were not the only possibility, Adam."

"There might be many possibilities," Rumbaugh said. "I am glad to have the warning about the worthless mine."

"I regret that you did not find out sooner," Abner replied. "You were not given the chance we had to doubt the ore specimen. I am told that the legend of the mine is real to you. You could not bear to have it in the hands of an irresponsible young fool. A fool, because he could not develop the thing, and because he would not sell to someone who might do it properly."

Abner indicated Adam and Sarah. "You, too, might consider that it would be easier to buy the land from surviving owners. Adam is a successful farmer. He would know that a man of greater means

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could develop a mine easier than he could. Sarah, as owner of the land, might be persuaded by him to sell to you. To bring this about, you would first have to remove the stubborn fool, Levi."

"This story is as strange as the one you told about Adam," laughed Rumbaugh. His eyes were bird-bright.

My uncle ignored the remark. "It might be that you intended no murder when you came by and saw Levi at the barn door with his skates. What caused it? Did you hit him when he gave you the ore again and told you it was worthless? Did you think he was lying, to make you forget the mine?"

"I intended no murder because I did not kill him," Rumbaugh said. "Your questions are useless."

"The questions may be useless," Abner said, "but those answers are not needed. You did hit Levi with the rock. I found it in the barn, bloodstained. You did put the skates on him and throw him into the pond. You were about to leave when you saw me in the distance, and you led your horse out of sight of the house. You then rode along the road and let me get you to help me retrieve Levi's body."

"I have heard many marvels from preachers," Rumbaugh said, "but none can match the ones you have been inventing here."

It was remarkable that any man's eyes could meet the stare which Abner gave Rumbaugh. "The marvel is that nothing is invented. The greater marvel is that a tiny thing has betrayed you."

Rumbaugh had met Abner's stare and continued to do so. "What would this marvel be?"

"A thread," said my uncle.

"I did not put the thread on the skate," Rumbaugh said. "Your nephew did."

Abner turned to Adam. "I am going to the door. Do not let this man leave."

He opened the kitchen door and reached to a peg outside. I heard him wring water from something. He came back carrying Levi's muffler.

"The man who threw Levi's body into the pond had to carry it there," he said. "Levi was wearing this. Hold out your arms Rumbaugh."

The thin man obeyed my uncle's command.

"Your sleeves are wet from helping to carry the body back," said Abner. "The rest of your coat is dry. If this muffler had touched you on the way back, it would have left a wet mark, or if it had shed

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any part of it, that part would be wet. Neither you nor Adam had anything on your clothes where you were wet."

He held out the muffler in his great hand. "Look at the color of the threads. Red as rust. Nearly as red as blood. If this cloth had lost any part of itself while Levi was carried from the barn *to* the pond, it would be dry."

Abner reached out with his other hand and clutched Rumbaugh's coat. "You are betrayed by a tiny thing, Rumbaugh. A tiny thread, red as rust. A *dry* thread."

Wrapped around the button encircled by Abner's hand was a thread. It matched the ones in Levi's scarf.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

HIDE AND SEEK

by ROBERT WAYNE WEAVER

Edgar Allan Poe at one time said
A chimney's no place to hide the dead.
He also observed that the floor is bad
For covering remains of dear old dad.
The telltale clues are extreme, you know,
Even walled in with Amontillado;
But a purloined letter provides a clue
To what exactly one must do
If one intends his hide to save:
Dispose of the body inside a grave.

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"Where am I? What happened to me? How did I get here?" . . . In the darkening room, in the darkening mind . . .

DARKENING SHADOWS

by PATRICIA L. SCHULZE

I struggle to breathe through the smoke and crackling flames, try to fight my way through bodies that scream in terror or moan in pain. I close my eyes against the stinging, acrid fumes and against the horror. When I open them again, bright sunlight is streaming through sparkling windows. I stare at pale green walls that stare back emptily, betraying nothing. Where am I? How did I get here?

There is the sound of a door opening and a woman in starched white looks in and says, "Oh, you're awake," and hurries away before I can detain her. My eyes come to rest on the tall aluminum stand by the bed, the clear liquid dripping soundlessly down the plastic tube taped to my arm. A hospital then, but why?

The nurse comes back, accompanied by a young man who seems to be a doctor. He goes about his work silently, poking, prodding, tapping, shining his light into my eyes. He pulls a chair up to my bed and sits down beside me.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. West? Can you tell me where you have pain?"

I brush his questions aside. I have questions of my own.

"Where am I?"

He smiles at me, waiting.

"Where am I? What happened to me?"

He still sits, pencil poised above a notebook.

I am getting angry and shout my questions again. Then I realize. There is no sound in the silence of the room. I move my lips but no sound comes out.

Now he is looking at me, frowning at his thoughts. I reach out to tap his arm, get his attention. I feel my arm lift, my hand reach for his. Then I see my arm lying there, motionless on the bed.

I try to speak the words again, forming them carefully with my

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lips. Nothing. I struggle to raise my arm, fight the weight that is pinning it to the white sheet, again and again. Can he read my lips? Are they moving or do I only think they are, like my arm?

He pushes the chair back against the wall and starts to leave. I fight violently for something, a word, a movement, anything. A wave of darkness washes over me and everything is black, the only sound a crackling of flames.

When I wake again it is evening and the room is bathed in the soft yellow light of lamps. There is a woman sitting in the chair by my bed and when I first look at her softly graying hair, determined jaw, the lines of laughter and love etched around her mouth and the corners of her eyes, I am confused. It could be me sitting in the chair. Me, 30 years ago, watching with love over the older me on the bed.

Then our eyes meet and I recognize my daughter, Carrie. When she sees that I'm awake she pats my hand and then presses the call button by my bed. A nurse comes and then the doctor and I listen as they talk in low voices by the bed, as though I weren't there, as though I can't hear them, as though I were dead. Then their words make sense in my mind and I realize. To them all these things are true.

I am no longer Elizabeth West. I am the severed spinal cord, the undetermined brain damage, the mute, the deaf, the unmoving sole survivor.

"Your mother was lucky. There didn't seem to be any hope at first, but we got to her just in time. I was there at the plane, where it went down—the twisted metal, all those bodies. It was a miracle she survived."

My daughter shudders, denying the miracle.

"Can she see?" she asks in an anguished voice.

"Yes, she can see."

"Is she aware of what's going on?"

"We can't really tell yet. I've tried to question her, but either she can't hear me or she can't speak to answer. Maybe both. We just don't know."

My daughter is crying silently, and the nurse leads her out of the room. I try to call after her, "Carrie, I can hear you, I know you, I am aware," but no sound will come.

The room is silent after they leave. I can remember the crash now, the flames, the smoke, the terror. But why was I on a plane? Where was I going? To my daughter? That must be right because she is

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here. Or did she come to me after the crash? Where is my husband?

My mind shies away from the last question, hiding something, something about my husband. But I can remember the crash. He wasn't there on the plane.

Then the words they have spoken and their meaning beat into my brain. Paralyzed. Never to walk, to stand. Never to move my arms, to hug a child, to caress away a tear. Never to speak, to sing, to laugh, to scold, to shout with anger. Fear, black and threatening, overpowers me.

The next morning Carrie is back, her weakness of last night washed away by determination. She takes everything into her own hands, giving orders to the doctor.

"As soon as she can be safely moved I want to take her home with me."

"She could go into an institution. I have to warn you, she probably won't know where she is anyway. She may not even know you."

"Thank God for that! I don't think I could stand it any other way. You never knew my mother. She was always so decisive, so much in control of things. She had to take on a woman's responsibilities when she was sixteen."

I can remember that. When I was 16 my mother died. There were two younger sisters to raise. Someone had to take over, it wasn't a big thing.

"It would be unbearable for her to be helpless now and aware of it. It's much better this way."

In my mind I echo my daughter's feelings. It would be much better to be a thing, with no thoughts, no feelings. I am only 65 years old. Will I live like this forever? Damn modern medicine with its miracles, its life-saving machines. Why did they have to reach me in time?

I dream of death, I pray for death, I will it to come. Are my prayers mute too?

My determined daughter has won her battle. I am bedded down in a corner of her living room, hospital curtains separating my nook from the rest of the room, but in the daytime the curtains are open.

I have been here for a month now. There have been so many changes, so many surprises. The taste of water. I never knew water had a flavor, it was lost in the taste and texture of other foods. Now all my nourishment comes through this tube in my arm and my tongue has only to deal with water.

There is the sharp, stinging coldness of the first icy sip in the

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morning, a feeling like stinging cuts on my tongue. At noon the coldness is gone and the flat liquid rolls down my throat, wetting but not arousing. By evening the water is warm and slightly dusty to the taste but with a shadowy metallic flavor which sets my tongue on edge. It is a pleasant sensation—all sensations are when there are so few of them to savor.

Then the feel of my grandchildren's warm bodies as they cuddle up on my bed, Tommy confiding in me all his adventures because he knows I cannot scold his too-daring nine-year-old boldness, and Kim prattling on about her secret world that no one else shares.

In my silence they find a fellow conspirator against the adult world.

Carrie comes in and shoos them away. She stands looking at me, something disturbing in her eyes. A gray, pulsating shadow surrounds her and I am afraid.

I am remembering more. All the years of control, decision, running things. Two sisters, a dying father, three children, my diabetic husband. There is something there, something about my husband that I cannot remember. Where is he? When I try to think, a dark shadow takes over my mind. It is like the shadow surrounding Carrie with her questioning eyes. There is a twinkling light in the shadow but my mind won't let me see it, my mind keeps pushing it away.

I can do nothing, I cannot move, I cannot speak, I cannot change the way things happen. I am helpless in the stream of life which moves on. It does move on. There are people about me whom I love. I am unable to help them lead their lives, but, amazingly, they don't need my help.

I have discovered the joy of letting go. I am alive. My prayers for death are a vague memory from the dark terrible past. I am alive, and I revel in the sights, sounds, smells, tastes that remain to me. Everything is simplified. There are no more burdens. I can just be.

But there is a darkening shadow on my joy. It is in my daughter's eyes. She watches me and there is a suspicion growing in her mind too terrible for her to bear. I want to cry out to her, "Leave it alone, do not ask."

But she probes at it, prodding it like a tongue worrying a piece of meat caught between the teeth.

Now she comes into the room and the doctor is with her. The shadow pulsates around them, growing darker. I cannot stop her from asking. I listen as he answers.

"I'm afraid you're right. The children sensed it first. I don't know

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why she can't speak—it may be hysterical rather than physical; but I'm sure your mother is fully aware of everything, her own condition, what goes on around her."

He gives her a pitying look and turns away. "I'm so sorry."

The shadow grows darker, shutting out the light from the living-room windows, blackening the room. There is something in the blackness of the room, a twinkling like glass catching light, that strikes me with terror. The twinkling is there in the room and in the darkness of my mind, the corner that hides something I must remember but cannot, or will not.

The darkness in my mind clears to a somber gray and I am in the bedroom of my house, standing by a bed looking down at my sleeping husband. My husband, blind from the ravages of diabetes, immobile from a last crushing stroke.

The twinkling grows brighter and I am standing in the bathroom looking deep into my own reflected eyes in the mirror. I remember.

The sparkling of the glass vial in my hands as it catches the sunlight. The small vial of insulin that I grip until it almost crushes in my hand. I stare deep into the eyes in the mirror and with a sad peace drop the silver hypodermic needle into the waste basket, replace the vial on the shelf to twinkle in the sunlight from the window.

Then I am back in the darkening bedroom, sitting by the bed, listening to the change in his breathing. Sitting for the hours that it takes for him to slip into the coma, and then the gentle release I have granted him.

Carrie and the doctor leave. The suspicion is gone from her eyes but there is something else. Something I have seen before.

The front door closes behind the doctor. I hear Carrie's footsteps returning. The shadow comes into the room with her, a gray moving presence that surrounds her. Now I see her eyes and recognize what has replaced the suspicion. I shrink before her eyes—the emotions are too strong, too terrible—love, compassion. Where have I seen those eyes before? It comes to me in a twinkling of sunlight on glass. They are my eyes, reflected in the bathroom mirror.

A cold sweat of fear covers my body and I struggle to speak as she comes closer, to make my lips form the words as the shadow grows darker. She is standing by my bed. I fight and fight to say the words, to wipe that terrible love from her eyes. My mind screams the words, "You are wrong, I was wrong," but my lips cannot move. It is too late, too late. . .

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a *NEW* novelet by

HENRY T. PARRY

John Richards was a prosperous young architect—happily married, three children, nice home, many friends. When he was called for jury duty, he learned something he'd never known, and it gave him the shock of his life. It would give anyone in the world the shock of a lifetime. Imagine it happening to you . . .

JURY DUTY

by HENRY T. PARRY

"I sent six men to the chair when I was District Attorney, and I've never regretted it. Never. In those days there was none of this bleeding-heart-no-capital-punishment-plea-bargaining nonsense. The law"—his voice took on a note of sternness and conviction—"was the law. If you killed, you paid for it."

Judge Anders stood before the members of the jury pool, a dignified old man, his face pink and luminous, his brows unexpectedly black under the gleaming crest of white hair that shone as if a spotlight poured down on it, one brown-spotted hand clutching the collar of his robe. Each morning he appeared before them to listen to requests to be excused from jury duty and to apportion generous servings of flattery to "you good people who have joined with me and the other judges in the sacred responsibility of seeing justice done." He took them into his confidence by relating incidents from his long career, making them feel that they had somehow been admitted to the highest levels of law enforcement.

"Let me say that society was no poorer for not having these people around. Except for one man I must tell you about—"

The court attendant responsible for managing the prospective jurors exchanged neutral glances with his assistant, and turned to answer the telephone.

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"—not the type you would expect to be guilty of murder. I can't tell you his name, of course. I became fairly familiar with him between the time of his conviction and his being, uh, taken away. Strangely enough, he used to consider himself lucky; he'd been through some hard fighting in the war and had won the Silver Star. He attributed his luck to the fact that his Army serial number had seven sevens in it. But his luck ran out, as I am about to tell you, and he died in the chair. Excuse me."

The court attendant muttered a message and the judge announced, "Mr. Burns says that no more juries will be needed today. You are excused until tomorrow morning."

Judge Anders strode out of the room, the black robe billowing, his story unfinished. The members of the pool trailed out, going down the marble staircase under the statue of Justice with her blindfold and her poised and waiting scales, and past the official-looking walnut doors of the District Attorney's office at the foot of the stairs. One man remained behind in the room, struggling to comprehend what he had learned for the first time: that his father had been executed for murder.

The knowledge shattered John Richards' whole concept of himself, as if his modest satisfaction with his young family, his pride in his work, his expectations, were all abruptly undermined, that suddenly he was tainted. The reality of the disclosure contrasted brutally with the daydream into which he had retreated when he was seven, a dream in which he had constructed the figure of the father he had never known. In the dream he and his father sat at the base of a ruined dam where water poured out through the masonry. As they fitted their fishing rods together, the boy talked earnestly to his father who answered seriously, pausing to think before he spoke, as if he realized the importance of giving the right answers.

His father's appearance varied from daydream to daydream: at times he looked like a younger version of the boy's grandfather; at other times he resembled the men in the hunting-equipment ads in the outdoor magazine his grandfather took; and sometimes his father was a presence to which he could give neither face nor form. But there was no doubt that the man in the dream was a hero, someone who would never be afraid, certainly a father he would never be ashamed of.

As Richards sat in the jury room, he recalled a conversation his grandfather had begun years ago on the night before Richards was to leave the farm for his first year at the state university. He sensed

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that the old man was reluctant to begin, as if he were nerving himself to perform an unpleasant duty.

"John, I never said anything to you about your father except that he died when you were a baby, and I ain't going to say much now. The reason was that we couldn't stand to talk about what happened to him. When Emmy was killed in that car accident—you were eight months old at the time—he brought you here. I wanted him to stay, but he said his business up in Weston was growing. I don't know, but up there he got mixed up with some people and somehow this happened—"

"Grandpa, if you'd rather not go into it now—"

"There's some things a body is better off not knowing. But just in case some day you hear different, though that ain't likely after all these years, I wanted you to know first off that your father was a good man, a kind and generous man. He did have a temper like a blasting cap. And he was a brave man too. Not only in the war—he won a Silver Star for keeping some bridge from being blown up and they don't hand those out with the rations—but in the way that he faced death at the end. Funny thing, he always said he was lucky. Marrying our Emmy proved that, he claimed. The reason he was lucky, he said, was because he had seven sevens in his Army serial number. But he wasn't. If only he could have lived."

"What did he die of, Grandpa?"

Before his grandfather could answer, the hired man came around the corner of the porch to say that the electric pump in the dairy barn had failed. The three of them went off to fix it and Richards heard no more of what his grandfather meant to tell him, if indeed the old man had intended to say more. His grandfather died two months later when a tractor he was repairing slipped off the jack and crushed his chest. Since Richards had never known his father or mother and had grown up happily with his grandfather and a housekeeper—the daydream of the father who listened and answered questions receding, but never entirely vanishing—the matter of his father had not concerned him too deeply. Nor did it then, especially as he was soon to enter an absorbing world of new horizons, ideas, and girls.

That was 20 years ago. The farm had been sold and the money used to pay for college and architectural school. After graduation he had got a job with a group of architects in Weston, the county seat, 50 miles from the farm. After eight years he had struck out on his own and had built up a small steady business in remodeling

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the 19th-century houses that remained in the old riverfront section of the city. When he had been summoned for jury duty, he had pleaded the press of work, but Judge Anders had refused to excuse him, saying, "Just the type of trained, creative mind we need for this important civic function."

When he gained some control over the confusing emotions that swept him, Richards approached the court attendant.

"Has Judge Anders ever said anything like that before? About the man he convicted of murder?" He struggled to sound casual.

"Lately he's been talking about it to every jury pool. I guess he likes to tell what a tough D.A. he was. Or something."

"Do you know anything about the case?"

"Before my time. If you're serious about wanting to know, why don't you go up to his chambers? He'd be glad to talk about it."

The elderly secretary who presided over the judge's outer office and who presumably faced some sort of bureaucratic suttee on the judge's retirement went into the judge's office and came back to say that the judge would see him. As Richards entered, the judge rose courteously to greet him, laying aside a newspaper.

"Sir, my name is John Richards and—"

A shade of concern crossed the judge's face and his manner subtly shifted to a watchful caution.

"—I should like to ask if the man you referred to downstairs wasn't named John Richards too?"

The judge nodded silently and waited.

"There can't be more than two men with seven sevens in their Army serial number, not in the period I'm thinking of. And it's almost impossible that they would have both won the Silver Star. The man you convicted of murder was my father."

"The John Richards I prosecuted refused to talk about any relatives he might have had."

"I never knew my father and I know nothing of his life. My grandfather raised me and he hardly ever spoke of him. All I knew was that he had died shortly after my mother was killed."

"Do you mean that this morning was the first time you were aware of what happened to your father?" Judge Anders asked with a note of incredulity.

"Yes. You can understand, sir, why I came to see you."

"Of course, of course." Judge Anders paused, as if searching for a way to explain a situation that was not explicable in human terms, that could be dealt with only in the bloodless language of the law.

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"First, you must understand that everything was strictly in accordance with the due process of law. It was a scrupulously fair trial. In this state a review by a higher court is required for all cases"—he hesitated—"involving the death penalty. There were no errors found. I got to know John Richards to a certain extent after the trial, although as it got nearer to—as time went on—he withdrew from all human contact. He told me he no longer cared what happened to him."

"Did he ever confess?"

"Never. Right to the end he maintained he was innocent. But, as I said, after a time he stopped talking."

"What were the circumstances? Please be frank. That is, if you're willing to tell me."

"I have no objection to telling you what I can remember. After all, that was thirty-some years ago. But are you sure you want to know?"

Judge Anders looked appraisingly at Richards, scanning the contained, trim aspect of the man, the red hair, the pale blue eyes that were troubled and questioning, and the set look of a person determined to get to the bottom of a question without regard for consequences.

"I know nothing about you," Judge Anders went on, "but I can make a good guess as to your circumstances. You're young, between thirty-five and forty, healthy, prosperous, reasonably well-dressed. You are married to a pretty young woman and you have two children—"

"Three," Richards interjected.

"—and have a good job or business, dozens of friends, a nice house. Why spoil it all? Why bring up circumstances of violence that can only cause you and your family to feel shame?"

Richards appreciated the judge's reluctance to bring up facts that Richards would have to contend with the rest of his life. This man impressed Richards as an able and kindly gentleman, a man retiring after an honorable career on the bench, respected, full of honors, not a person who would willingly dredge up for the sorrow of another a crime of more than a third of a century ago. Wouldn't Richards be better off not knowing the details of his father's crime and punishment, letting it be forgotten? Why not accept the scanty information that his father had died in disgrace, and go on with his present happy and useful life, with Laura and the children forever in ignorance, and bury deep within himself the knowledge that he

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bore the genes of a man whom society had destroyed as if he were a rattlesnake. He found himself rapping his clenched fist against his thigh, as if some inner flange was now vibrating with involuntary intensity.

Caught up in a grim perplexity, he knew only one way to handle it. He would probe and, if necessary, fight until he knew the truth.

"Now that I know this much, I must hear the whole thing."

The judge swiveled his chair around and looked out at the courthouse columns whose capitals stood a few feet beyond his windows. He rocked gently, lips pursed, the experienced trial judge mentally summarizing the salient points of a case. When he spoke, the personal warmth that had marked his speech was absent, as if he had decided the matter was more mercifully told under the pretense that neither of them was involved.

"John Richards was convicted of shooting and killing his business partner, Thomas Laroche. It was clearly Murder One, first degree murder. Their secretary overheard them having a bitter argument in which Richards threatened to kill Laroche. That night a witness saw Richards enter Laroche's house and come out again fifteen minutes later. Mrs. Laroche came home and found her husband dead, sitting in front of his ham radio equipment. He had been shot twice."

"What was my father's defense?"

"Practically none. No alibi, no supporting witnesses. He admitted having threatened Laroche that afternoon and admitted going to his house that night. But he insisted Laroche was alive when he left him."

"What about a weapon?"

"None was ever found."

"Who defended him?"

"Henry Huber. Good man too. I did make mincemeat out of him though." The judge permitted himself a fleeting, self-congratulatory smile at the memory. "He's been gone for twenty years, Henry. He couldn't do much but parade character witnesses and point out that Richards had never been in trouble before. But that's true of most murderers. There had also been a number of unsolved murders in Weston that summer and the people were stirred up. It would have been difficult to impanel a jury that wouldn't convict, given a reasonable case. I know defense counsel was thinking of a change of venue but your father wouldn't have it. He said he was innocent and therefore it was unnecessary. And Harry Mather heard the

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case—Judge Harry Mather, an extremely firm and, some thought, vindictive old man. Liked maximum sentences. At any rate, one tough old boy, even for those days."

"Are any of the people who testified still around? Or anybody I could talk to about the case?"

"I really can't say. I doubt it. Look, why don't I do this? I can have a transcript of the trial dug out for you if you want it. I don't recommend it but I would like to do what I can to—I'd like to do what I can. I think you'd be better off not going into it. Nobody connects you with the John Richards who stood trial all these years ago."

"I would appreciate it. I want very much to read it."

"Leave your address with Miss Chester outside. If you have any questions after you have read it, I'd be glad to try and answer them."

Richards thanked him and rose to leave. The judge rose with him and accompanied him to the door, a paternal hand on Richards' shoulder.

"I realize how painful this must be to you. But no act is complete within itself, is it? Everything we do affects someone else."

They shook hands, the old judge's face somber and sympathetic, his dark eyes expressive and understanding but at the same time showing a self-possession, as if he was firm in the knowledge that he had done what was required of him and had no regrets. It occurred to Richards as he went down the marble staircase under the statue of Justice that he regarded the old man as a sympathetic friend and not as the prosecutor who had sent his father to the electric chair. But he took no comfort from the judge's last words which lay heavy within him.

"Sir, is there any doubt in your mind that my father was guilty?"

"None whatsoever."

For the tenth time Richards reviewed the cards on which he had summarized the testimony of the key witnesses as recorded in the transcript.

John Coughlin, police officer: Dispatched at 12:40 A.M. to Laroche residence where he found Laroche dead, sitting in front of his ham radio equipment. Mrs. Laroche in hysterics. No sign of forcible entry or of struggle. No weapon found.

Mrs. Agnes Laroche: She had come home about 12:30 A.M. and found her husband's body in the room over the garage which he used for his short-wave radio equipment. She knew of no enemies her husband may have had. There was nothing missing from the

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house. She knew that relations between her husband and his partner, John Richards, had been strained for some time. Her husband never discussed business matters with her but he had told her that Richards felt he was spending too much time and money cultivating influential politicians. She did not know of any reason why Richards or anyone else would have killed her husband. Then who did she think had done it? Before defense counsel could object, she answered: John Richards. Objection sustained, reply stricken and prosecutor admonished. (And damage done.) Defense counsel asked Mrs. Laroche why there had been a gap of four weeks between the time of her initial questioning by the police and the resumption of such questioning. She had been emotionally upset and had been away for treatment. Defense dropped this line of questioning.

Corinne Kressler, secretary for the firm of Richards and Laroche, air-conditioning contractors: On the afternoon of the day of the murder Mr. Richards had come in, angry and upset. He rushed into Mr. Laroche's office and slammed the door. There was a bitter quarrel, their voices growing loud and angry. Mr. Richards accused Mr. Laroche of defrauding the company by approving payments to the Roman Appliance Company for equipment which was never delivered. This practice had been going on for two years. She had directed Mr. Laroche's attention to such bills and he had approved them for payment. Had Richards threatened Laroche with violence? Yes. He said: I'm going to get a gun and shoot you. He also called him a thieving, double-crossing punk.

Mrs. Florence Messenger, who lived across the street from the Laroches: She had been sitting on her patio when she saw Richards come down her side of the street, cross the street directly under the street light, and enter the Laroche driveway. Time was approximately 10:30. The lights were on in the Laroche house in the room over the garage. About fifteen or twenty minutes later she heard two sharp noises that could have been shots but she was not sure what shots sounded like. She heard a car engine start on the other street a few minutes later. She did not see Richards leave the house, but he may have gone out another entrance because the Laroche house was accessible from two streets. She knew Richards because he had spent time at their house installing air-conditioning equipment. She and her husband were friendly with the Laroches, frequently dining out together, taking in each other's mail during vacations, etc. She had not learned about the murder until the next morning. Extensive cross-examination failed to shake her story.

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John Richards: He admitted to having an angry argument with Laroche because Laroche was systematically defrauding the company that he, Richards, had worked so hard to establish. He admitted that he had threatened to kill Laroche. He did not own a gun nor did he have access to one. No alibi for the time of leaving the office that day and the arrival of the police to question him the next day. He had gone to his bachelor apartment, he said, made dinner, and returned to the office where he had spent the evening estimating how much Laroche had stolen. He had gone to Laroche's house that night to demand that Laroche sell him his share of the business. He intended to deduct from the amount he would pay Laroche the amount that Laroche had fraudulently paid out. Laroche had refused and a bitter quarrel followed. He left the house about 10:45 P.M. No, he did not kill Laroche. No.

Laying the cards aside, Richards faced up to the fact that his father was a killer. Not the patient joiner of fishing rods below a dam of his early daydreams, but a hot-tempered, possibly unbalanced egocentric who put money ahead of human life. But even as his conscious mind told him this finding was true, an undefinable loyalty made him reject it. What he was being loyal to he could not have said. To some dim ancestral idea of blood and family? To his own children? Or to that childhood daydream? With grim resolve he picked up the cards one more time.

The meager notes he had taken from the microfilmed files of the local newspaper told him little he had not learned from the transcript. The jury had been out seven hours and had returned a verdict of guilty, first-degree murder. He noticed that the news stories were under the byline of Xenophon Miller. In the telephone directory he found an X. Miller with an address in the old section of town. Telling himself that he had nothing to lose, he dialed the number but did not expect that whoever answered would have any knowledge of an event that had happened so long ago.

The voice answering was tentative and husky, but after several exploratory throat-clearings a more confident voice emerged. Richards identified himself and asked, "Are you the Xenophon Miller who worked on the *Examiner* years ago? The one that covered the courthouse?"

He noticed his own voice sounded angry and challenging and toned it down.

"It isn't likely that many people would be named Xenophon. Nor is it likely that, having suffered under that name, a man would

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name his son Xenophon. Yes, I covered the courthouse for the *Examiner* in my younger days."

"Would you be willing to talk to me about a trial you covered? A murder trial. The man being tried, John Richards, was my father."

There was a silence at the other end of the line. Richards could hear him breathing into the transmitter.

"I see. Well, yes, yes, why not? I don't know what I could tell you after so much time has passed. You read the stories I turned in at the time, I suppose?"

"Yes, but I keep hoping that I can learn more. Just what I don't know."

"Something that will let you hope he might have been innocent probably. But I'd be glad to tell you whatever I can remember. Come to 2005 Camac Street. It's off Locust, between Eighth and Ninth."

Camac Street was a solid row of small brick houses, each with three marble steps rising directly from the sidewalk to the front door, with their uniformity broken at Number 2005 by a wooden ramp.

He pressed the bell and the door lock gave its answering buzz, allowing him to enter a small hallway whose walls were lined with autographed pictures and framed cartoons.

"In here. First door on your right."

The room had the oppressive quality and the close-pressing smell of space used for unwilling confinement. The man who swung his wheelchair away from a typewriter had the overdeveloped torso and the rested, unlined face of the immobile person, with yellowish skin and large square teeth and brown eyes that had jaundiced whites and a milky edge to their pupils. He greeted Richards with the suppressed eagerness of a man who is alone much of the time and who spills forth in talk when the infrequent opportunity presents. Two aluminum walking sticks with clamps for the forearm lay on the floor.

"I remember the trial all right," he said, when the preliminaries were over, "because those stories were the first I had under my own byline. Paul Anders was the D.A. then and Henry Huber was defense counsel. Judge Mathers presided, a tough, stern old gentleman, and maybe a bit of a fanatic."

"Was there anything questionable, in your opinion? Were the witnesses reliable people? I guess I'm hoping to find some unsteady types, some psychotic eager for attention, some pathological liar. Anything to lead me to believe that an error had been made."

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"No, there was nothing like that," Miller said. "They were all quite average people. Their testimony was solid. They all made a good impression and the defense lawyer couldn't shake them. So did Richards for that matter. It was hard to believe that a man of his type would deliberately shoot his business partner. If there was anyone who might have been a few bricks short of a full load, it might have been Judge Mather. But that's just my own suspicion."

"What about the motive, that Laroche was defrauding his own company?"

"My guess is that it was true. But who knows? Mrs. Laroche said at the trial that Richards had been angry with her husband because he spent too much time and money cultivating politicians instead of tending to business. But from the scoop going around at the time, Laroche was trying to get a contract for air-conditioning state offices. Laroche made himself useful to Herb Willing who was the party's county chairman back then, a man with considerable influence. Still has, come to that.

"Now there's another thing," Miller went on. "Paul Anders was trying to get the party's nomination for governor that year. That was one reason he pushed the Richards prosecution so hard. It kept him in the public eye and made him look good with the law-and-order types. It looked like he might have a chance, but Herb Willing pulled the rug out from under him when he didn't line up the required organization support. After that Anders had to fold."

"Why did this man Willing do that?"

"Who can say? He may have heard that Warren—that was the other leading candidate in the primary—had latched on to a lot of money for the campaign. Anders never did have too much dough behind him. Or maybe he figured that Anders couldn't carry the state even if he did get nominated. Or maybe the Warren people had promised goodies in return for organization support. Anyway, Willing put the organization behind Warren and that finished Anders. But, in a way, it may also be the reason that Anders got his judgeship four years later because Willing backed him when he ran for the bench. Some say Willing was trying to make it up to Anders but I don't believe it. Herb Willing is just about the craftiest man I ever saw and he'd double-cross you without thinking twice and never suffer a pang over it, let alone try to make amends."

"Judge Anders was very considerate and sympathetic when he talked to me."

"Yes, he's mellowed. He was an aggressive prosecutor though. But

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in the Richards case there was no need to be overzealous. The case against him was solid and, as I said, the witnesses were all upright, unimpeachable citizens, the kind that would impress a jury. Funny thing, though, that Mrs. Messenger, the chief witness against your father, her husband did time. But that was several years later."

"What did they get him on?"

"Arthur Messenger was convicted on a blackmail rap and got two years. He had his own auditing firm. If an audit showed that an employee was defrauding his employer, Messenger just suggested that the employee contribute a small part of the take to him. In return, the defalcation wouldn't get written up in the audit report. Nobody knows how many cases he got away with or who was making payments. I seem to recall that Mrs. Messenger divorced him while he was in the slammer."

"What happened to her? Is she still alive?"

"She was last Christmas. I saw a picture of her in the *Examiner*. Something about a celebration among the residents of that retirement home out on Route 78. Elmwood, I believe it's called."

"Did you know Laroche?"

"I'd met him around town any number of times but I didn't really know him. He didn't come from around here. He had the reputation of being a hard-nosed businessman. They were an effective team though, him and your father. He was a good salesman and your father was good on the technical side."

"You say that Laroche was friendly with, or at least associated with Willing?"

"I don't think Herb Willing ever had a real friend. Laroche hung around with him some, yes, because I used to see them in the same foursome. That was before—" He glanced down at his withered legs.

Richards summoned himself to ask the question that he had wanted to ask from the start.

"Did you know my father?"

Miller shook his head. "No, I never knew him. He seemed to me at that time to be pretty much of a loner. No relatives that I ever heard of. If you want my advice, I wouldn't look into this thing any further. What good is it going to do?"

"Good or bad, I've got to know. Let me ask you: did you think he was guilty?"

Miller took a deep breath and seemed embarrassed. He shifted in his wheelchair and looked down at the floor where an open book lay face down, revealing its title: *Hiking Around Katahdin*.

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"Yes, I thought he was guilty. It was the death sentence that was shocking."

"One last question. Do you know who owned the Roman Appliance Company back then?"

"Yes. It was Herb Willing."

The walls of Herbert Willing's office held scores of photographs—of political conventions, of politicians long since forgotten, and an enlargement showing Herbert Willing posed with a candidate for President of the United States. On the ancient rolltop desk there was only one picture—of a gentle-faced woman with a scarf around her head, dressed in white, and standing on a dock before a summer cottage that was overwhelmed by pointed spruces. The little old man sitting at the desk cackled with an unrepentant relish, delighting in a fresh audience.

"Us old codgers, we like to run on about how things were in the old days. Far as I can see, things ain't so much different today, except maybe you got to be a little more careful since the IRS got hold of these computers and the modern tendency of people to run to grand juries. What did you say your name was again? Richards? You kin of the Richardses used to farm down in Elk Valley Township?"

"Yes, Mr. Willing, my—"

"Call me Herb, son, call me Herb."

"My father, John Richards, I already told you about, and my grandfather was Alexander Clark."

"Grew up down that way myself but I got big ideas and came up here to the county seat to make my fortune. Getting back to what we were talking about, I'm real sorry I can't tell you much about your father's case. That year we stayed up at our summer place longer than usual. Miriam"— he glanced at the photograph on his desk—"wasn't feeling just right and she wanted to stay."

"I wanted to ask you about the Roman Appliance Company. Laroche was defrauding my father's—and his—company by paying Roman for equipment that was never shipped. You owned the company, I believe."

"I can see you've been real thorough in your digging, young man. I did back then, but I sold it, oh, maybe thirty or so years ago. When we came home at the end of that summer, and I found out what was going on, you know what I did? You want to know what I did?"

Richards did not answer, sure that Willing would tell him.

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"I hired the best auditing firm around here, that's what I did. They investigated the billing and shipping, not only to Richards and Laroche but to everybody else. They didn't find a thing, not a thing. I can't help what that secretary testified to at the trial. It just wasn't so."

"Do you recall what auditing firm that was, sir?"

"I don't remember what name it had. It was run by a local man named Arthur Messenger. Long since gone." And he added with calm satisfaction: "Long since gone."

Richards waited, expecting Willing to relate how Messenger's audits were suspect in view of his use of their findings for blackmail, but Willing had swung his chair around and was gazing from his windows across the square at the courthouse, smiling in reminiscent gratification over some gamey deal long past, or possibly because he had outlived the participants.

"Mr. Willing, what was the story about Judge Anders' failure to get the party's nomination for governor?"

"Oh, that. Now I always got blamed for not getting behind Paul that time. But I've never been one for lost causes. Tell you what happened. Oh, this was typical of what used to go on all the time, this was typical." He wagged his head in amused and tolerant disapproval.

"Fellow named Charley Taylor was treasurer for Paul's primary campaign. One day Tom Laroche showed up at the storefront that Charley had as campaign headquarters and gave Charley an envelope with five thousand dollars in cash in it. Fifties and hundreds mostly. Wanted to help out with Anders' campaign, he said. Paul didn't have too much money backing him anyway and they were glad to get it. Charley put the cash in the bank right away. It was all perfectly legal.

"Now there used to be this fellow Louis Calley operating in this end of the state. Louis specialized in slot machines, bookmaking, and prostitution, all against the law. It wasn't generally known but Louis was backing this Warren fellow who was running against Paul. Well, Louis took five thousand dollars in cash out of the local bank. There was a teller at the bank who was way behind on some sporting obligations to Louis and this teller made a list of the serial numbers of the bills he gave to Louis.

"When Charley Taylor deposited in the same bank the money that Tom Laroche gave him, this same teller made a list of the serial numbers of Charley's bills and lo and behold it was the same money.

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He gave Louis both lists and Louis took them to Paul Anders and Charley Taylor and said here is a list of the serial numbers of the bills we have contributed to your campaign. You are taking gambling and prostitution money. You don't drop out of the race, we see that the newspapers get both lists.

"The Anders people, of course, would never be able to explain how somebody like Louis Calley would know exactly what those serial numbers were unless he had given the money in the first place. Louis said that if the story did have to come out, he, Louis, would deny it publicly but then would have one of his people pretend to defect and say he had given it to Laroche for Anders' campaign."

"What did Laroche say?"

"It was a lie, he said. All done to smear Paul. The money he had handed to Charley Taylor was his own. Well, when Paul and Charley told me how the Warren people had mouse-trapped him, I realized there was no point in backing Paul because he wouldn't have a chance if it came out that he was taking that kind of money. I told you this was the old days. So I suggested to the county organization that they should back Warren and not Anders."

Richards wondered in whose devious mind the scheme had been conceived. Laroche with his eye on state air-conditioning contracts? Or could it be the merry old gentleman sitting opposite him?

"I should add that the bank teller left town a couple of months afterward. And about a year later Louis Calley was found dead of bullet wounds, received, it was generally believed, in the course of a business dispute. He was not widely mourned.

"We did make Paul a judge four years later and everybody agrees that he's been a good one too. Oh, the stories I could tell you, young man, the stories I could tell you, if I wasn't afraid some revengeful persons might still make trouble. A good thing, the statute of limitations, a good thing. Prevents small-minded vindictiveness."

Richards found in himself a grudging liking for this amiable unregenerate, attributable, he concluded, to Willing's having shown an interest in his problem and in having taken the time to talk and listen to him.

"Ever hear how we elected Ed Hanes to the legislature? Ed was just about the dumbest person who ever broke a schoolteacher's heart. But he had this twin brother, Howard, an identical twin, who was just as smart as Ed was slow. But if they both kept their mouths shut, you couldn't tell one from the other. So—"

When he was able to free himself from Willing, Richards sat in

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the courthouse square to think over what he had learned, if indeed he had learned anything outside of the political dirty tricks of long ago. As he sat, he saw Herb Willing leave the building in which his office was located and trot briskly across the square, greeting people left and right, mount the steps of the courthouse, and disappear between the Greek columns which have become inseparably linked with the majesty of the law.

The nurses' station lay at the intersection of two corridors, commanding the rows of doors where old people were stored in institutional loneliness. The woman who looked up in answer to his query had hair that had been teased into a spun-candy scrimshaw, rising precariously above the butterscotch-colored frame of her glasses. "You must be the guy come to pick up her things, hunh?"

"Things? No, I'd just like to speak to her if I may. Would she be willing to talk to me for a little? I wouldn't be long."

"Mister, Mrs. Messenger died five, six days ago. You di'n't hear?"

This then was where his search ended, he thought, with the death of the witness whose testimony had condemned his father. Whatever the truth of the matter, and he had found no reason to suppose that the trial had not disclosed the truth, it was no longer possible for him to continue. Expecting nothing, he nevertheless gathered himself for one more hopeless question.

"Was Mrs. Messenger close to any of the other residents?"

"She was friendly with her roommate, Miss Moffet. They'd sit for hours telling each other how things were in the old days. The old days." She sniffed. "Come on, I'll take you down to Miss Moffet."

Richards followed her well-packed uniform down the corridor to Miss Moffet's door where the nurse gestured for him to wait. "Just let me see if everything's okay before you go in. Last thing these old gals give up is an interest in how they look."

From the interior of the room she nodded abruptly for him to enter. Before she introduced him to Miss Moffet, the nurse pointed at a bare bed, mattress and pillow stripped of covers, in whose center lay a small pile of belongings—a dusty traveling bag, several long plastic bags containing dresses and coats, a framed photograph, an elaborate alligator makeup kit, and several shoeboxes, relics pitiful by their meagerness. "Mrs. Messenger's."

"Now, Betty old dear, this here gentleman would like to talk to you about your old friend, Flossy Messenger."

"A gentleman caller. How wonderful!"

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Miss Moffet extended a small hand that Richards noted with surprise was gloved, as though she were waiting to be taken out, and beamed up at him from a tiny wrinkled face with soft faded blue eyes that matched the ribbon holding her hair, a much-loved doll that has been outgrown and put on a back shelf to await what will come. The gloves, it seemed to him, were not in keeping with the embroidered bedroom slippers that dangled childlike a few inches above the floor. She pointedly ignored the nurse and with her free hand twisted a heavy necklace.

"I'll leave you two to have your little talk. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Miss Moffet's disdainful glance followed the nurse from the room, the princess's contempt for her jailers.

"I should like to ask you about what Mrs. Messenger might have said about her younger days. Did she ever tell you about a trial in which she was a witness?"

"Trial? No, she never said anything about a trial. She always talked plenty about herself, but she never said anything about a trial."

"It was my father, John Richards, who was being tried. Did you ever hear her mention his name?"

"No. She did say that she divorced her husband—that's his picture there on the bed—and that he had been mixed up once in some funny business. She never said what. Maybe he had a trial. I don't know why she hung on to his picture if they were divorced."

"No, that wouldn't be it. Did she have any relatives? Any children? Did she ever remarry?"

"No, she's just like me. Got nobody at all. Except she's been here longer than I have. In all the time I've been here, I don't remember anyone coming to see her. She did have somebody who wrote to her regularly though. But she never talked about it. I used to tease her that it was an old beau."

"How do you know that she received letters?"

"How do I know? My dear young man, take a look in that shoebox of hers on the bed there. No, not that one. The other one."

The box was tightly packed with envelopes, most of them yellow with age, tied in bundles of twelve. He selected a bundle at random, untied it, and saw that they bore a postmark date of 25 years ago and that all but one were postmarked in Weston. The exception had been mailed from Maine, from either Grimstone, Grindstone, or Grinstone, the printing in the postmark being unclear.

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He scanned rapidly through the other bundles and found that the dates on the envelopes ranged from the previous month to more than 30 years ago, with most envelopes bearing a Weston postmark but with the occasional one being mailed from the indecipherable Maine post office. None had a return address and all were addressed to Mrs. Arthur Messenger.

"Do you know what's in these envelopes?"

Miss Moffet raised one shoulder, tilted her head toward it, and smiled.

Richards opened an envelope and took out four $50 bills. Extracting one envelope from each bundle as a sample, he quickly examined the contents and in each envelope found $200. In no envelope was there a message. Florence Messenger, the divorced wife of the auditor-cum-blackmailer, had been receiving $200 a month for over 30 years. It appeared that the deceased Arthur Messenger had made some provision for his former wife's welfare.

"Did Mrs. Messenger ever talk to you about these letters?"

"No, never. I knew that there was money in them though. After she died, I looked into them. I must confess I was tempted to take some of it, but I decided instead to just continue to look for some nice gentleman to take care of me."

"On what day of the month did she receive these letters?"

"Almost always on the first. She'd look inside and then stick them in the shoebox."

"What day did Mrs. Messenger die?"

"Last Thursday. What was that, the twenty-eighth?"

"Today's the fourth. Did a letter come for Mrs. Messenger on the first of this month?"

"No. I wondered about that too. So I asked out at the desk, just to be sure. But none came."

"So it looks like whoever was sending her money knew that she was dead before the first of this month."

"It was in the *Examiner* on the twenty-ninth. That she died."

"So if she had no relatives who had to be informed of her death, the only announcement of it would have been in the local papers."

"I suppose so," Miss Moffet said. "I guess somebody in the office here sends something to the courthouse or somewhere. Vital statistics, something like that."

In any event, he thought, the person who had been paying the money, and who had so promptly discontinued payment, would quite likely be a local resident. But what good did it do to find all this

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out? Even though Mrs. Messenger had been the most damaging witness against his father, the fact that she had been receiving regular payments since approximately the time of the trial did not mean there was a connection. Arthur, the ingenious auditor, who was undoubtedly behind these payments, had had nothing to do with the killing of Laroche nor with the trial. Curious as to what Arthur Messenger looked like, Richards took the framed photograph from the bed.

The face was strong and pleasant, with regular features and even, he thought, a hint of high-mindedness about the forehead. Richards could see him rising at the meeting of this or that association to propose that the Christmas contribution be increased this year. As he grasped the picture, the paper that had sealed the back of the frame crumbled under his fingers.

He turned the picture over and through the gaps in the ancient tan paper he saw an envelope. He tore the backing off the picture and extracted the envelope. It was addressed to Thomas Laroche and bore foreign postage and an illegible postmark.

He sat down on the bed to read the letter, and as he read he felt a sense of lightness and relief, a lifting of the weight which had settled on him and grown more grievous ever since the morning when he heard Judge Anders begin to relate to the members of the jury pool his account of how he had sent John Richards to the chair. When he had finished reading, he kissed Miss Moffet and rushed from the room.

"The judge says come right in. Mr. Willing's in there now but he's about to leave." In a lower tone, she added, "He's been about to leave for the last hour."

"—and he stuffed two hundred and fifty ballots into the box like he was supposed to," Herbert Willing was saying, "but instead of marking them for us in black pencil, he used that trick pen he carried, the one he kept filled with disappearing ink, so—"

Judge Anders was smiling tolerantly, possibly reflecting that the price one paid for Willing's support was having to listen to his stories afterward. He came forward to greet Richards, with his hand extended in welcome.

"How nice to see you again, Mr. Richards. Have you made any progress in the painful task you have set for yourself? Herbert here tells me you have been picking his brains."

"Only what's left of them, Paul, only what's left of them. I wore

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them out in the service of the people and of good government. Some folks think that's the same thing. It ain't."

"Let me say right away why I have come here. I've found a significant piece of evidence. Don't go away."

Richards' statement was directed to Willing who had risen and started for the door.

The atmosphere changed abruptly, as if the two elderly men had recoiled from a suddenly perceived threat. Richards could hear the glottal catch of Willing's open-mouthed breathing. Judge Anders stood motionless, a man like any other, it flashed through Richards' mind, when divested of the dignity of robe, bar, high-backed chair, and draped flag. Richards smoothed out the pages of the letter and began reading in a strained, halting voice, head down, as though wishing to avoid seeing the reaction his words would cause.

"This letter is addressed to Thomas Laroche and is from Tumut, New South Wales, Australia. It is dated one day after Laroche's murder. When you adjust for the International Date Line, that means it was written on the date the crime took place."

Dear Tom:

(Am I right in recalling that the handle is Tom?)

Instead of sending you the usual QSL card confirming our contact, I thought I'd write to you about what I picked up from your transmission. You must have slid the holding ring up on the push-to-talk lever on the D-104 and left it there. Isn't that the mike you use, the D-104? I wish I had one because they do have an exceptional sensitivity but anyway . . . You left the carrier on and the signal strength was unusually good, so I could hear quite clearly what went on. I couldn't raise you back to ask you about it, so I figured you still had the antenna switched to transmit. So I gave up and decided to write out what I heard. You were just telling me about the Collins KWS 1 when you were interrupted.

You: I didn't hear you come in.

Him: The front door was unlocked. I knew you'd probably be up here. Is your wife home?

You: No, I don't expect her until around twelve.

Him: Good. I don't want any witnesses. You know why I'm here. I can tell it just by looking at your face.

You: You can't prove anything.

Him: Yes, I can. We got hold of that miserable bank clerk who was in on the deal and scared the story out of him. You knew that Charley Taylor was too smart to accept prostitution and gambling

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money for the Anders campaign. Because you gave it, Charley assumed it was a clean contribution. You traded on his confidence in you. And you stopped the Anders-for-governor campaign before it ever got started.

You: If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.

Him: Let's see if you can stand heat.

You: Put it down! Don't point it at me! Anders! Don't!

Then I heard these two sharp cracks and that's all. But maybe I have too lively an imagination and everything is all right. Speaking of a Collins KWS 1, I would like to get one but I'm going to have to think about it a long time because court stenographers don't get rich.

Just thought I'd inquire, cobber. What goes on among you Yanks anyway?

The handle is Harry—Harry Stebbins. VK4ST

Judge Anders walked unsteadily to his desk and sat down, his head bowed. Herbert Willing's face showed a swiftly dawning comprehension that made Richards think that the wily storyteller had at last had some long-standing questions answered. The three sat in silence, a silence like that which follows an explosion.

Finally Willing asked, "Where did you get the letter?"

Richards explained how he found it hidden behind Arthur Messenger's picture.

"But how did Messenger get it? It was mailed to Laroche."

"The testimony brought out that the Messengers and the Laroches were friends as well as neighbors. They used to take in each other's mail, things like that. The testimony also showed that Mrs. Laroche was away from home for treatment immediately after Laroche was killed. So the Messengers were probably taking in the Laroche mail. Arthur Messenger's known tendencies toward blackmail being what they were, he without doubt steamed open the Laroche mail to see if he could learn anything that some day might bring him a dishonest dollar. He simply kept the letter. He was smart enough not to extort too much from His Honor, and cautious enough to keep his wife informed."

"Judge Anders," Richards struggled to keep his voice even, "I want to hear you say that my father, John Richards, was an innocent man."

"John Richards"—the old man lifted his head and stared with stricken, unseeing eyes—"John Richards was an innocent man.

"I am getting old," the judge went on in a barely audible voice.

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"The knowledge of what I had done was getting to be more than I could bear. Each time I faced a new jury group, I found myself talking about the Richards trial, almost convincing myself that it was their fault if they couldn't see what I had done. I hoped that someone among them would stand up and point at me and say, 'You, you were the guilty one.' At the same time I was afraid that I might have answered, 'Yes, yes, I am guilty.' And I am."

Richards stuffed the letter in his pocket and walked out of the judge's chambers. He went down the sweeping marble stairs to the floor below and paused with his hand on the knob of the District Attorney's door. He looked back up the staircase at the statue of Justice blindly holding out her uncompromising scales. There was no statute of limitations for murder, as the prosecutors on the other side of this door well knew. But the wrong had been done and no power could undo it. In any event, in Judge Anders' case it would not be too long before extra-legal sentence would be handed down. He withdrew his hand from the door and went out between the Greek columns into the sunshine of the courthouse square.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 546th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "It had been some years since Todd and I had climbed trees together" . . .

The author, Anne Perkins Dewey, is a widow, and her "three children have grown and flown." She has "a compulsion to create puzzles"—her favorite is the double acrostic. Her work background is a fascinating mosaic: author of a biography (of Robert Goddard) for young people; medical illustrator; raiser and seller of dogs (Irish Wolfhounds); accident-room aide; editor of a newsletter for a social and service organization at Harvard; reader and taper for a blind lawyer who teaches international law.

And still plenty of time for hobbies: tennis, sailing, cooking, Scrabble, and writing occasional light verse . . .

SPIDERZAN'S REVENGE

by ANNE PERKINS DEWEY

We needed to arrive at the Town Hall in time to get in, but too late to sit together. If I could manage that, the timing of what followed should work all right. In college, in "Drama and Film," I had studied this particular picture in great detail, so I knew what happened and when.

As Todd and I left for the show, my stepfather leaned from the parlor window and bellowed after us, waving his beer, spilling it out onto the veranda floor. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, boys. And *don't* hurry home!" Oh, Lord. Was Vic just being his usual unpleasant self, or was he expecting a visit from his girl? His big hooting laugh followed us into the street. You would have thought he'd said something really funny. Everything about the man was easy to hate, and for this I was grateful, because I was going to kill him. Tonight.

"Aw, Luke, come *on*! You want to miss the beginning? Do you?

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We probably won't get *seats*, Luke!" My fourteen-year-old half-brother's voice was high and thin when he was upset. I hated to make him miserable, but it couldn't be helped.

"Steady," I said. "There's plenty of time." He knew there wasn't. He did one of his unplanned sidesteps so suddenly that I failed to dodge, and we collided. "Steady, Todd!" I said again. I took him by the shoulders to set him back on course. Close, like that, I could see that where his long hair mostly covered them, a fresh set of bruises was beginning to take color, one on each side of his throat. It was foolish to ask, because I already guessed how it had been: the old man had had a few drinks; Todd had done something clumsy. Or Toddy had done nothing at all. He had just been there—a convenient target. So why ask? I suppose I needed to keep my anger level up.

"Never mind! I broke a plate and he grabbed me, was all. B-big deal!" Todd was trying not to cry. "Jeez, let's get going, Luke, huh?"

A little way along one of my school friends stopped us. Henry Dodge. "Dodger" gave me a hearty thump across the shoulders.

"Hey, man! Great to see you back! They throw you out already?"

"Not yet, Dodger. Just a long weekend."

"Made the team?"

"Second string," I said. "Listen, Dodger, we got to hurry. We're going to the show."

"You're taking him to the picture?" The Dodger looked surprised. "Say, it'll do him good!" he added, a little too heartily.

Do him good? I thought. Like taking the dog for a run? And how come some people weren't talking *to* Todd, nowadays, but around him; the way they might with someone who was—peculiar. Things must be really bad for Todd, with me away. Damn Vic! Damn the brute!

Todd was pulling me along.

"Listen, Luke," he said. "Will Mrs. Mike let us in, if we're late?" What a question, I told him. She was his oldest friend, for goodness' sake. She wouldn't let him down, ever. This made him happy for half a block. Then he asked, "How come she went away, anyhow?" And for the hundredth time I wrestled with how to explain, knowing that I couldn't.

Agnes Carmichael—Mrs. Mike—had been our housekeeper, and our mother's nurse and friend. Then Mom died, and I heard Mrs. Mike tell Vic he'd bullied his wife right into the next world. He jumped at the excuse to fire her. The series of giggling incompetents who had followed pleased him very well. They were all considerably

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younger than Mrs. Mike, and—to Vic—more accommodating.

So I didn't try to answer Todd, and now it was I who hurried along impatiently.

It was nearly dark when we reached the Town Hall steps, and Mrs. Mike was closing the big double doors. I called to her to wait.

"My stars!" she shouted. "That you, Luke? You home? That the Cricket with you?"

Vic had always called Toddy "Hoptoad," or just "Toad," but to Mrs. Mike he was "Cricket." His frequent sudden jumps and outcries had begun soon after he was born, possibly because of slight brain damage, Mom's doctor had suggested. But picture Vic accepting that.

"You boys better hurry on up here!" Mrs. Mike said now. "Show's about to start!" She scooped Toddy and me to her big pillowy bosom, and my cheek felt the scratchy stuff on her sweater. She was a large plain woman who nevertheless liked her "pretties." Tonight there was a whole galaxy of shiny beads on the front of her, and she was wearing the enormous round pearly earrings she had always worn on her nights off.

The darkened hall was jammed. The film title flashed on.

"There's only singles, or way up front," Mrs. Mike whispered. She unzipped Todd's jacket and began to take it off for him, and his long hair fell back. Her mouth thinned and her hands gripped the jacket, hard. Our eyes met for a second. Then she shooed us into the auditorium as the last credit was fading from the screen. "I'll find something," I whispered, pointing Todd toward a single seat at the back. "See you after."

I felt my way down the aisle in the almost total darkness of the famous opening scene where the only action is a pinpoint of light moving back and forth. The first few rows of seats were empty, as I had known they would be. Only little kids liked to sit up that close, and little kids didn't get to see this picture. I stopped in the seat at the end of the first row to set my stopwatch, nervously shielding the luminous dial.

From the time the background music cut in—any moment now—to the end of the second inky interior scene would be exactly 32 minutes, 18 seconds.

When the first chords sounded I punched the timer button, and was up and away. Or *down* and away, in a low profile crouch. Groucho Marx gone mad, I remember thinking—or miscast as the phantom of the opera.

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At the right-hand front corner of the room I dropped into the little well of steps winding down into the emergency exit. Just as I remembered, the door to the outside was set at an angle not visible to the audience. I opened it, wiped the knob clean, and slipped outside.

The ancient elms and maples, still in full leaf, obscured most of the street lights. I stood behind one of the big trees while someone walked by on the other side of the street, trailing a dog on a leash. Otherwise, I was the only being in sight, a piece of luck which probably wouldn't last. But I could cope with this. What I couldn't cope with were the unpredictables, the terrifying "what if's."

What if it rained? The leaves were beginning to flip over the way they do before a storm. What if the fire whistle blew, and people came and went in all directions, on foot and in cars. What if the ancient film projector broke down? Perhaps I was crazy to think I could pull this thing off. "Innocent by reason of insanity" came to mind. Cold comfort! Then—"Innocent till proved guilty!" I reassured myself. They might *suspect* I'd left the hall. They wouldn't be able to prove it. The "what if's" weren't going to happen.

But now the dog was taking an interminable time at the foot of a street sign. "Finish, dammit!" I whispered, and magically he did. Dog and master moved off and disappeared, and I jumped for the branch overhead and pulled myself up.

I found myself in a secret world I had half forgotten, till recently. It had been some years since Todd and I had climbed trees together, and invented a game we called "Tarman and Spiderzan." The object had been to get from one end of town to the other through trees and on fences and stone walls, over garages and potting sheds and doghouses—any way but on the ground. You lost a point every time a foot touched earth, and ten points if someone saw you.

A little red Volkswagen "bug" came up behind me out of nowhere, swinging around a corner, taking me by surprise. I felt sure the driver had seen me where I lay plastered like a second-story man to the roof of our doctor's henhouse, but the car kept on going. A minute or two later and a block farther on, the same "bug" tore toward me from the opposite direction, and sped on past. I seemed to remember it from somewhere else, but at the moment I couldn't place it.

Surprisingly now I found I was a little ahead of schedule, which wasn't necessarily good. It wouldn't do to have to hang around too long somewhere near the Hall, waiting for dark scene number two

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to begin. The rector's well house seemed a good place to regroup. In the little rectory across a few yards of tidy lawn a solitary light was burning, and I knew old Mr. Windom was alone in his study.

"I'm thinking of you, Rector," I said softly.

If the old man had been capable of hate, *he* might have killed Vic, long ago—Vic who couldn't have cared less about his late wife's promised gift to her church, whining "unexpected expenses" when it came time to pay for the new organ. In desperation the elderly minister had personally sold, borrowed, and mortgaged to the extent that it seemed unlikely he could ever afford retirement. "I'm thinking of you, Mr. Windom," I said again.

"And of you, Maggie Tindle!" The Tindle house was behind Mr. Windom's.

Maggie hadn't been much, really: stupid and giggling and careless, but meaning no harm—the first girl Vic hired after Mrs. Mike. She had been with us only a few weeks, during which time Vic did a lot of grinning and strutting. Then suddenly Maggie's parents sent her away—as is still the custom in some small towns—to "visit relatives." She had never returned.

I could hear the lonesome sound of Mrs. Tindle's piano. "I'm thinking of you, Mrs. Tindle," I said. Then it was time for me to start off again, so I slid down from the well-house roof.

There were two close calls before I reached home—a neighbor's dog that set up a brief fuss before recognizing me for a friend, and a pair of lovers in a car I thought was empty till almost too late. But no one was around when I finally reached the wall opposite our house. From there I could see light from the television, flickering, blue-white, around the silhouette of Vic's head. He sat where he always did, the back of his chair close to the window. This was the way he fell asleep, every night. The only thing was, something or someone was passing back and forth across the open window.

There was a lot of noise going on—TV full volume, branches thrashing in the rising wind. Nevertheless I mounted the steps at the corner of the wide veranda cautiously, conscious of the creaky places.

Now I saw what had been moving around. A curtain had somehow come adrift. Normally it was anchored by a satiny sort of braided thing; now it was blowing back and forth outside the window sill.

With an end of the clothesline wrapped tightly around each fist, I went close to the window, within reach of Vic, and knelt with my knees against the wall. And then I stood up. There was nothing to

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do. The tassled ends of the curtain tie dangled from a neat knot half embedded in the flesh of Vic's thick neck, and his head was tilted unnaturally to one side.

I stood and stared, while waves of revulsion, relief, and yes—disappointment!—swept over me. I started to back away, unable to take my eyes from the thing in the window, and my foot rolled over something round and hard, like a large marble. I fell sprawling, and heard whatever it was bounce from step to step onto the walk. A marble? Todd didn't play with marbles.

I allowed myself a few seconds before starting back, and when I saw the round thing, I pocketed it. I don't know why.

I was back at the Hall in pretty good time. There were about two minutes left before the start of the second darkened-room scene, so I slipped around the corner of the building to wait where the town employees parked their cars. At this hour there was only one—an old red Volkswagen. This time I remembered.

A recent paint job had thrown me off before, but now I recognized the chassis. Its battle scars had been acquired at the hands of an old friend, a driver who happened to be more enthusiastic than skillful, and who was, incidentally, a lover of colorful things. I reached for the thing in my pocket. It was smooth and round and lusciously pearly, except for a tiny rough spot where old glue had broken away.

I dropped the piece of her earring onto the seat of Mrs. Mike's old car and started for the exit and my re-entrance. Then I stopped, appalled by my own stupidity. How could I have forgotten, having tested it so often as a child, how this door had always been locked from the outside, to discourage young freeloaders? Hopelessly I reached for the doorknob. It turned, almost pitching me inside in my surprise.

Mrs. Mike, as I have said, was a woman who looked after her own.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 547th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a dying-message story (oh, Ellery, what hath thou wrought?) . . .

We quote from the authors' response to our inquiry about background: "Like Ellery Queen, Hal Charles is the pseudonym for a pair of writers. Two thirty-ish English teachers at an Eastern Kentucky university, they have previously written for academic journals and educational television . . . They love tennis, basketball—any sport, which is probably why their detective is a sports agent."

"Sudden Death" is not Hal Charles's first attempt at detective fiction. Their first submission to EQMM was the most unusual we have ever received. The story was acted out as a drama and sent to us on a cassette! . . .

SUDDEN DEATH

by HAL CHARLES

Ben Beauchamp, the All-Pro quarterback of the L.A. Knights, spent most of his college career reading defenses and mysteries. I remember the night of the victory over Penn State in particular. The team was going down to Bernie's Tavern to celebrate, but Ben wanted to get back to the dorm to finish an Ellery Queen story.

"Don't you ever get tired of that Sherlock Holmes stuff?" I asked, tossing my helmet into the locker. "If somebody ever murders you, just be sure to leave me a—what-do-you-call-it?—a dying clue."

He flashed his perfect-checkup smile. "You can bet your season's tickets I'll name him."

Four years later Ben forced me to take his remark seriously.

Every year Ben, Jumbo, Irish, Rick, and I got together to celebrate our graduation. Throughout college we had been more than just

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fraternity brothers. The four of us ate together always, studied together—occasionally—and even dated the same girls. When we started school, none of us thought we had a snowball's chance to finish, and that's why celebrating our graduation meant so much to us.

Of course, Ben got further than the rest of us. After taking the Knights to the Superbowl in only his third professional season, he'd become a household word in more ways than one. For two years he had led the league in every offensive category, including endorsements. But to one of us, using Beauchamp Aftershave every morning must have become more than a slap in the face.

Let me explain. I was running behind schedule as usual, and I got to that new condominium of Ben's a couple of hours late for the party. When I told the guard on duty whom I wanted to see, he got a strange look on his face, then had another officer escort me upstairs to the penthouse.

As the elevator doors opened, I felt I'd stumbled into the middle of a policeman's convention. One cop stood at the door while others rummaged through a trophy case, snapped pictures, and sprinkled fine powder all over the place.

Sitting at the kitchen table with their heads drooped were three of my buddies.

Kevin Setter—good old "Irish"—once the fraternity B.M.O.C. and now an insurance agent, was dwarfed by the chair he was clinging to.

Jumbo Whitehouse, always looking for the next pie-in-the-sky in college, now stared vacantly at the floor.

Rick Jardaine, Omega's resident Rembrandt, wrung his artistic hands nervously, probably wishing he were back in New York where he drew illustrations for some ad agency.

But where was Ben?

As I approached the kitchen, a kneeling uniformed officer suddenly rose and without a word answered my question. At his feet was a white-chalk outline. I turned away quickly.

"You Josh Holliday?" a gravelly voice called from the kitchen.

Coming toward me was a squatty figure in a rumpled gabardine suit. "Lieutenant Ruggerio," he said, flashing his badge. "Your pals said you'd show up."

"What's going on?" I wanted to be told my suspicions were wrong.

"Homicide. Looks like the Knights are going to have to bring along that rookie quarterback faster than they expected."

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His eyes half shut, Jumbo lifted his watermelon head. "Ben's dead," he slurred, "and they think one of us killed him."

"You've got to be kidding, Lieutenant. We're buddies—like brothers."

"You calling this suicide?"

"No way! I'm Ben's agent. Believe me, he had everything in the world to live for."

"Look, Mr. Ten-Percent, it's one or the other—suicide or murder."

"How come?"

"Simple," he rasped in a voice that made me want to clear my throat. "The building's new—computer-controlled climate, and so on. Even in this penthouse you can't open the windows. There's no outside door and no sign of forced entry. You've got to enter through that elevator you came up in, and it's controlled by the guard downstairs. Only four guys came up here. One's dead. Therefore, Beauchamp killed himself or one of the other three dusted him."

I looked over to the kitchen table, expecting my friends to defend themselves—at least, say something—but they sat there as silent as a loser's locker room. "What's wrong with them?"

"Drugged. The security guard brought up the pizzas that had been ordered. He found all four of them lying on the floor. When he couldn't revive Beauchamp, he called us."

I sat down on Ben's plush-velour couch. "If they were all unconscious, how could one of them be a murderer?"

"The M.E. says the drug was in their drinks. After the perpetrator was sure the others were unconscious, he did his work, then took a drink himself."

"But how did Ben die?"

"Our bartender-murderer doctored his drink with something a bit stronger."

I sat there in disbelief. The five of us had had our share of arguments, but nothing that would call for murder. Sure, Rick had lost an ad agency job because he couldn't land his good friend Ben as a client, and maybe he still held a grudge. And Jumbo hadn't been able to pay back the money he borrowed from Ben for a fast-food scheme that had fallen through. As Ben's agent, I thought Ben had had to pressure Jumbo to get the money back. Irish? As thin-skinned as ever about his wife. Ben had dated her first in college and never missed an opportunity to needle his old fraternity brother about her being one of his discards.

I guess each one had a motive, but I still couldn't believe that one

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of them would actually kill him.

Lieutenant Ruggerio stood across from me and lit a cigarette. "Look, Holliday, I know how you feel. Billboards and magazines aren't going to be the same without that Beauchamp smile."

I heard the Lieutenant talking, but in the back of my mind I only saw Ben's grinning face that night of the Penn State game. Had he followed through on his promise and left a clue? I felt kind of silly thinking about it, so I didn't say anything. Still, I couldn't help looking around.

"Don't touch anything," Ruggerio called from the kitchen where he was jawing with some uniformed cop. "We're not finished with the investigation."

"Was Ben here?" I asked, looking at the expensive gaming table a couple of feet from the outline on the floor.

"Yeah, we found the glass with the poison in it there. Looks like he was playing cards, took a drink, and toppled backwards."

Perched on the green felt was a huge cut-glass tumbler that still had a faint smell of bitter almonds. Beside it a score pad revealed that ME was beating YOU, 195 to 145. Scrawled across the bottom of the pad was the word BLITZ. Facing the scorer's seat, several sets of cards had been fanned out: three sixes, three fours, and the 7-8-9-10 of spades. In the middle of the felt sat the deck and some upturned cards. Across from them there was a pile of cards face down.

I stared at the table. Ben had been good at gin rummy. I ought to know—I'd lost a lot of laundry money to him on road trips, in hotel rooms, buses, wherever we could make room to spread the cards. The more I scanned the table the more I realized something was wrong.

Maybe my idea wasn't so silly after all. Ben, suddenly realizing his drink tasted funny and who'd mixed it, had left me a clue to his killer.

"Lieutenant!" I called. "Ben tried to point to his murderer."

"What are you talking about?"

"Do you play gin?"

"Not since my Army days. So?"

"Check that score pad. Ben labeled the score a BLITZ, but 195 to 145 isn't a blitz."

"If I remember right, in gin a blitz is a shutout, a whitewash. One player goes out with the other guy at zero."

"It's a dying clue. Ben once joked that he'd leave one. He knew

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I'd show up late, and he left a message for me, a message I'd get, but the killer wouldn't."

Lieutenant Ruggerio cleared his throat, glanced down at the table, and then up at me. "Okay, you've got more than I have. Read it to me."

That stopped me. I had concentrated so much on finding the clue I hadn't stopped to consider what it might mean. But that mystery-loving jock was talking to me. Jock. Hadn't Ben and I played college football together?

"Bet you never miss one of the Knights' home games, Lieutenant. Ever seen a blitz at The Coliseum?"

"Yeah," he said. "It's defensive strategy. To put more pressure on the quarterback, you blitz or red-dog him. You send one of your linebackers to take his head off. Any of your buddies play football?"

"The only contact sport Irish went for was dancing. Jumbo was too busy hustling a fast buck, and Rick, well, he was more interested in pigment than pigskin."

"So much for football. Got any other ideas?"

"Possibly. Didn't you say you were in the Army?"

"Yeah. Back in W W Two."

"Then you remember the German blitz."

"Sure. The Nazis' favorite tactic."

"Strike fast without warning."

"Hey, any of those guys ever in the service?"

"That's the bad news. We all had deferments."

"Then, any one of them from—?"

"German ancestry? Sorry. The closest tie any of them had with Germany was bock beer."

My brain was beginning to ache. I'd come to a dead end and was thoroughly frustrated. Put me across the table from some general manager and I'd negotiate a good contract, but detection seemed out of my league.

Then it hit me like a Dick Butkus forearm.

"I got it!" I shouted with more enthusiasm than a benchwarmer getting to play.

Everybody in the apartment froze—as in one of those E. F. Hutton commercials. I looked over at the table where Rick, Jumbo, and Irish were seated. How could he have done it? "Lieutenant, you were right all along. Ben *was* killed by one of his friends. In fact, you told me who yourself."

"Which one?"

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I pointed at the now-sober figure. "Irish."

Despite being read his rights, Irish insisted on talking. I guess he hadn't planned on having a conscience when he killed Ben. He readily admitted that Flo, his wife, was driving him up a wall by constantly comparing him to Ben.

"Do you know what it's like," he asked me as they led him away, "to be over your head in debt and have your wife point out that Beauchamp just signed a million-dollar contract for TV commercials?"

I was still thinking of Irish when Lieutenant Ruggerio interrupted, wanting to know how I'd fingered the killer.

"Exactly what Ben told me came back. He didn't say he'd describe his killer's profession or ethnic background. He said, 'I'll *name* him.' Ben and I were football players, and blitz is a football term. You used another football term to tell me what it means."

Ruggerio looked puzzled.

"Red dog—a red dog—a setter, an Irish Setter."

It was a nice way to remember Ben. On his last play he'd made the perfect call.

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DEPARTMENT OF THIRD STORIES

A grandfather and his grandson fishing where "the solitude of the lake was almost spiritual" can be a peaceful experience, or a revealing one, especially when the grandson is a priest . . .

SHE WILL LIVE FOREVER

by D. O. BELL

The day before my grandfather died, I was with him in his fishing boat out on the lake. It was late spring, and I was home for a visit. I had just been graduated from the seminary and was only a few days away from my first parish assignment.

I was awakened just before dawn by a light knocking at my bedroom window. Startled for a moment, I had trouble getting my bearings for this was my first night in this room in many months.

"Want to go fishing?" my grandfather's raspy voice was asking. He knocked on the window again, a little louder this time. His house was next door, up on stilts, extending right out over the lake. He was a widower and had lived alone for several years.

I rubbed my eyes and opened the window.

"They'll be bitin' today," he said. He looked like a leprechaun in the fog in his fishing cap and jacket.

"Sure," I said, "I'll be right out." I had never turned down an invitation to fish with him—or do anything else with him, for that matter. His company was the best there is.

The boat was already loaded and waiting when I arrived at the dock. He tossed me a life jacket as I gained my balance in the boat. "You got to respect this lake," he said. "She's full of mischief and mystery and fate, and you got to respect her."

The next minute we were speeding out from the landing—grandpa in back at the controls and me in front with a thermos top of coffee in my hands. The early fog was quickly bowing to the morning sun

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and retreating offstage like a chorus line making way for the star. The lake was calm and green and alive.

Grandpa was heading toward some secluded and remote finger where few went except those who really knew the lake. No one knew it better than Grandpa. He had lived on the lake all his life, had earned his living on it with his fishing and his motel. Even his leisure was spent on the lake.

When he found the spot he wanted, he killed the motor and cast his line a few yards out. He stood in the boat, as steadily as if he were on land, and slowly began reeling in his line. Birds—herons and ducks and geese—could be seen in the marshes in the distance. The lake water lapped against the boat as it gently rocked. A slight breeze was to our backs.

"This fishing's still good here," he said.

At first I thought he was talking about the spot to which he had brought us, then I realized he meant something deeper. He had just ended a lengthy and expensive court battle in which he had sued local farmers to enjoin them from spraying pesticides on their crops near the lake.

"There won't be any planes poisoning this lake," he said. "Some places are just holy ground, son. I'm sure you've studied all that."

I smiled and nodded.

We were both quiet for several minutes. The solitude of the lake was almost spiritual.

"Man drowned out here two days ago," he said.

"I heard," I said.

"He was in one of my boats, had just rented it that morning."

"I didn't know that."

"Yep," Grandpa said. He looked at his bait and cast again. "He was in one of my boats, and the boat sank."

I didn't know what to say, but I felt he was expecting some sort of response, so I said, "The paper just said he drowned in the lake."

"Did the paper say what an important man he was?" Grandpa asked.

"I don't recall it," I said.

"Well, he was. He was the president of the power company." Grandpa paused a moment, then added: "But this lake is no respecter of persons. The man forgot his life jacket, and he tried to swim to shore, but it was too far." Grandpa's line jerked, then went slack again. He reeled in, replaced the bait, and cast again. I cast in the opposite direction, but not as far.

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You didn't have to be a priest or even a grandson to see that Grandpa was troubled by the drowning. I knew enough to fish and listen: he would tell me what he wanted to tell me in his own good time.

"Anybody that knows this lake knows not to tempt fate," he said. "She was born in destiny, and she will always live in destiny."

"Sounds as if you believe all those old legends," I said.

"The stories about this lake didn't grow out of lies," Grandpa replied. "That Indian chief had no choice. It was time for the lake to come into being. He was just a part of her destiny."

How soon after the origin of the lake the legend began no one seems to know, but it is a famous legend in this part of the country. The lake was formed from an earthquake in the early part of the nineteenth century. The river backed up and overflowed into the great depressions left by the huge quake. There had been Indian tribes living in the area, and it is from that fact that the legend sprang.

Before the earthquake the area was woodlands and prairie lands and streams. A Choctaw tribe and a Chickasaw tribe lived peacefully there. The Chickasaw chief had a clubfoot, and for that reason none of the women of his own tribe would marry him. On the advice of his warriors he went to the Choctaw chief to bargain with him for a wife. They smoked the peace pipe and talked of trade. The club-footed chief saw a beautiful maiden pass, and instantly fell in love with her. He told the Choctaw that she was the one he wanted. The Choctaw grew very angry because the maiden was his daughter. He would not bargain for her. But the Chickasaw would accept no other. He offered many skins and mussel pearls, but the answer was still no.

The Chickasaw returned to his camp and plotted to kidnap the maiden, but in a dream he had a vision that told him that if he kidnaped the Choctaw maiden he would anger the gods. He tried to forget her, but he could not. He decided that he must carry through his kidnap plot. Then, during the wedding ceremony, the earth began to move to the beat of the ceremonial drums; the earth opened up, and the great waters rolled over the Chickasaw chief and his bride and his people.

"There's destiny in this lake," Grandpa said. "That's all there is to it. She was destined to be here, and she's destined to stay. You can't stop destiny."

"What do you mean, Grandpa?" I asked.

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He sat down in the boat and let his line hang limply in the water. "Well, son," he said, "you take for example that power-company man dying. They had plans to build a power plant right over there"—he pointed toward the nearest bank—"and that plant might've killed the lake. Killed the fish, the plants, the water. Just killed the lake. Now the man that was pushing it through is dead. Killed by the lake."

Grandpa was referring to the company's proposed plan to build a nuclear power plant in the spot he had indicated. "And you think that was destiny?" I asked.

"You know the history of this lake?"

"I know about the earthquake and the Indian legend."

"And the nightriders? You know about them?"

"Not much. I just know they were vigilantes."

"That's right," he said. "In the early part of this century there was a group of investors. They had a name too, but I don't recall it right now. They had a big moneymaking scheme. They planned to drain the lake and turn her into farmland. Thousands of acres of farmland. And no doubt she would've been choice farmland, the *best* farmland. But this spot was destined to be a *lake*." He pointed emphatically toward the bottom of the boat.

"What happened to the investors?"

"The lake people became nightriders to scare them off."

"Must have worked."

"It worked after the leader of the investors caught a bullet between his eyes. His body was buried in the lake and it was never found."

"Did they know who did it?"

"Some said one, some said another. There was all kind of speculation. Some people thought it was a woman. Others believed it was a boy. But it didn't really matter since they couldn't find the body."

"So it's still a lake instead of farmland," I said.

"And always will be. Those people should've known they'd fail."

We were silent for a long stretch until grandpa made a strike and began reeling in a handsome bass. I got the net and helped him land it.

The joy he got from bringing in that bass will be in my memory forever.

He cast again, then sat down. "Listen to her," he said. "Have you ever heard anything so lovely?"

We fished another hour or so and caught a couple apiece. Then

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grandpa cast out one last time and slowly reeled in the line. Just before he got the line out of the water he turned toward me and said, "Son, it's been my good fortune these eighty years to have been a child of this lake. I'm old, and I'll be dead soon, but I'd not be lying if I told you that I'm proud to have been a part of her destiny."

He looked at me strangely, and that's when I was supposed to *know*. But I didn't understand until the next morning when the police came to arrest him and found him dead. It was only then that I realized I had heard my first confession, a confession of two murders, one of them two days old and the other sixty-five years old.

"Q"

An incident in the life of a great poet . . .

IN OLD EDINBURGH

by EDWARD WELLEN

ROBERT BURNS: Ay, yon's a bonnie lad, and I should join in welcoming him hame. But, though I may be daft, I hae the notion he's not the true Davie. For a' that the likeness to Davie is unco' eerie, e'en to the birthmark on his cheek, I canna help thinking he's but passing himself off as the auld laird's heir. I hae it. Weel, I'll be hangit. Ay, that's where he gangs sairly agley. He's tattooed the birthmark on artfu' eneugh, but it's on the wrong cheek. Nae doot he trusted to a mirror, and a mirror does *not* show us oursels as ithers see us.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

CLASSIC REPRINTS: It has generally been left to smaller publishing houses to reprint the fine books of the past (the past being defined as anything published before noon of the preceding day). Editions have necessarily been limited in size, and bookshop availability has been severely restricted. Something nice has been happening.

In addition to the smaller houses (International Polygonics and its expensive but handsome paperback reprints of Baroness Orczy's *The Old Man in the Corner*, Carroll John Daly's *The Man from the East*, and now Richard Hull's *Murder of My Aunt* ($5.00), Foul Play Press—six Phoebe Atwood Taylor titles, with five Stanley Ellin novels in the works—plus such hardcover houses as Gregg Press, which reissued 15 titles in 1979 with 22 on the schedule for 1980, including the first six S. S. Van Dine novels about Philo Vance and the first six Richard Stark adventures of Parker, and the Mystery Library, which continues to issue an occasional title of major historical significance), some of the larger publishers have jumped into the game with both feet.

Walker has been systematically reprinting Edmund Crispin's Gervase Fen zany antics in hardcover, and St. Martin's has recently released, in both hard and soft cover, George Baxt's trailblazing *A Queer Kind of Death*, the hilarious narrative of Pharoah Love, the first—and quite likely the last—black homosexual cop in literature. In paperback, Vintage has resurrected A. A. Milne's *The Red House Mystery*, a must for anyone who considers himself a reader of the mystery genre. Dover, which still, for my money, produces the best bargains in the world of books these days, has a new edition of Philip MacDonald's *The Rasp* ($3.50). Avon offers new editions of Patrick Quentin's excellent series about Peter Duluth ($2.25 each) for *Puzzle for Players, Puzzle for Friends,* and others. Scribners selected the second Philo Vance book, *The Canary Murder Case,* for reprint.

And, of course, to help celebrate the Golden Anniversary of Ellery Queen's first publication, Signet has special 50th Anniversary editions of many of the Golden Age Queen novels ($1.75 each), including the landmark *The Roman Hat Mystery* and

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several others with geographic references in the title (*Spanish Cape, French Powder, Dutch Shoe, Greek Coffin,* etc.). All in all, a Golden Age for relocating the great old books, and for discovering new ones.

BLOCKBUSTER AWARD: The first annual "Nero" award (presented by The Wolfe Pack, the official Nero Wolfe/Rex Stout/Archie Goodwin fan club) for best book of the year went to Lawrence Block for his most recent entry in the Bernie Rhodenbarr saga, *The Burglar Who Liked to Quote Kipling* (Random House, $7.95). The first of the series, *Burglars Can't Be Choosers,* has been a huge success in a paperback reprint.

Speaking of Lawrence Block, his many fans were delighted to see his *Ariel* (Arbor House, $9.25) selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club. This terrifying tale of a wicked little girl is a departure from his other work and has an unusual history of its own. His agent had once told him that it was unpublishable so he stuffed it back into the desk, where it languished for over a year. With a little touch here and there, it has become his biggest success to date.

HOLMES AGAIN, HOLMES AGAIN: More on the Sherlockian scene, but, praise be, not another newly discovered manuscript by John H. Watson, "edited by" someone or other. *Sherlock Holmes: The Man and His World* by H. R. F. Keating is the type of intelligent and fascinating book we have come to expect of the creator of Inspector Ghote of the Bombay police. The new addition to the Holmesian literature is as much a history of Victorian and Edwardian England, with particular emphasis on the criminal and legal procedures of the day, as it is a factual history of the world's first consulting detective. Handsomely illustrated with Sidney Paget's original drawings of the Holmes canon and with many illustrations pertaining to the geography and history of the era, this is one of the more essential Sherlockian volumes in recent years (Scribners, $12.95).

Ruth Lake Tepper has made no attempt to disguise the fact that her new book is a sequel. It is called *The Sherlock Holmes Crossword Puzzle Book II* (Norton, $3.95, paper), and it is exactly that—a collection of crossword puzzles based on Holmesian themes. The added lagniappe is a partial retelling of famous cases, requiring the solution of the puzzle to learn the secrets posed at the conclusion of each narrative.

NOTES: William L. DeAndrea, who won an Edgar for Best First Mystery of the Year for *Killed in the Ratings* last year, has written another thriller about Matt Cobb. Bravo! Congratulations to William P. McGivern for being elected President of the Mystery Writers of America, following the term of the immensely talented Lillian de la Torre, author of the Dr. Sam: Johnson detective stories. McGivern, author of such classics as *The Big Heat, Rogue Cop, Odds Against Tomorrow,* and the newly filmed *The Night of the Juggler,* has worked mainly in Hollywood in recent years—to the benefit of the film industry but to the loss of the book world.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The long-awaited debut of *Mystery!* happens mid-February over the television stations of Public Broadcasting across the nation. The same brains behind that decade-long success, *Masterpiece Theatre,* are hoping for "an even broader audience appeal" (this means more men viewers, more younger viewers) by importing class British mystery shows witty and stimulating enough "to distinguish them from the usual mystery fare seen on American television." Great. Fifteen programs are scheduled for this season, and there will be more seasons (Mobil is bankrolling it) if the series catches on. And—although some of the shows are eccentric and maddeningly mannered—there is enough really first-rate mystery ahead for the series to merit your attention each and every week.

The premiere story is rather tongue-in-cheek, though: a 1920s thriller, Dornford Yates's antique *She Fell Among Thieves,* in which two impeccable aristocratic heroes in their Rolls-Royce storm castle dungeons to rescue damsels and tussle with an outrageous *femme fatale* (Eileen Atkins as the villainous Vanity Fair). Malcolm McDowell and Michael Jayston play their cloak-and-swagger roles so magnificently *straight* they keep the light-hearted farce just this side of being overdone camp. But worth following.

Then, four episodes involving cranky, corpulent, cagey Horace Rumpole, barrister of England's Old Bailey court. Rumpole (Leo McKern)—whom you will adore—takes on clients no one else wants because they challenge his imagination and sense of poetic justice. Part *bluff, but mostly wise, Rumpole* brushes cigar ash from his rumpled suits, battles windmills, *yet wins.* The four shows are outstanding television.

The weeks that follow will present a miniseries version of *Rebecca,* in which the seas of the Cornish coastline churn with the undercurrents of romantic suspense, and three Dick Francis racetrack mysteries—both the pageantry and the shadowy underworld of the turf. The series will close with three tales of Victorian crime solved by Peter Lovesey's Sergeant Cribb. Bushman Gene Shalit will be the American host of the series, speaking from a gargoyle set designed by Edward Gorey. *Masterpiece Theatre,* which itself had not neglected the mystery, having imported productions of *The Moonstone* and several Lord Peter Wimsey adventures, is to be congratulated for this concentration on our genre. Onward the *Mystery!*

ABC-TV's *Tuesday Movie of the Week* has also in its late-night network premieres brought us some unusual mystery fare. As previously reported in EQMN, the last Charlie Chan film debuted here. Recently the showcase presented *Terror in the Wax Museum,* a low-grade 1973

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whodunit which had only a brief theatrical life, but which interestingly can compare with such other waxen horrors as Lionel Atwill's *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) and its celebrated remake, the 1953 *House of Wax*, one of the great money-makers of the screen both theatrically and on TV. In *Terror in the Wax Museum*, Ray Milland as curator takes us on an amusing tour of the famous murderers and their victims posed in every nook and cranny of his establishment (in Victorian London).

In this film, as a novelty, some of the wax figures are actually the Laguna Beach Players—from that California community where once a year the residents pose in living tableaux of classic paintings and statuary. Even knowing this, it comes as something of a start when the wax representation of Jack the Ripper suddenly stirs and strikes. Though by no means a masterpiece, this small film is entertaining, has a plausible murder puzzle, and is the only film in recent memory to reveal the identity of the killer (after the usual discussion of modus and motive) in the *very last shot of the movie*.

Tuesday Movie of the Week also to its credit recently premiered *Nero Wolfe*, the telefeature version of *The Doorbell Rang* reviewed last year in EQMN. The late Thayer David was a thoughtful, Falstaffian Nero, Tom Mason was a youngish, flip Archie, and the adaptation—by Pulitzer Prize author Frank Gilroy—stuck reasonably close to its source. Handsomely mounted—the New York settings looking exactly right—and with a good supporting cast (Anne Baxter, Brooke Adams), this Edgar-caliber show has for all its topicality—FBI duplicity is an issue—been shelved by television networks, mainly I think because all its action is cerebral. Now it is being syndicated to local stations, and you will have other opportunities to see it. Make it a point.

Producer Emmet Lavery, Jr. informs EQMN that there are still hopes for a weekly series, perhaps starring Orson Welles—but does that portend a Nero quaffing only Perrier and California wines?

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

George O'Toole is generally known as a true crime specialist, but several years ago he published an entertaining occult spy novel called *An Agent on the Other Side* (1973). His second novel, an extravaganza of historical research and speculation, is quite different but equally enjoyable.

★★★★G. J. A. O'Toole: *The Cosgrove Report*, Rawson, Wade, $12.95. In the year 1868, Pinkerton detective Nicholas Cosgrove is assigned to discover whether John Wilkes Booth, supposedly shot to death by soldiers in the climax of a long manhunt, is really still alive. The client is Secretary of War Stanton. Cosgrove's in-

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vestigation turns into a reexamination of all the mysteries surrounding the assassination of Lincoln. The story is ostensibly a newly discovered manuscript by Cosgrove. A present-day "editor" provides footnotes, clarifying, confirming, and sometimes correcting statements made in the account, and an afterword speculating on the document's accuracy. The mock scholarly apparatus is a very clever touch.

Though the book is a trifle long-winded, it displays a nice feel for the period and its speaking and writing styles. Numerous historical figures appear. The sympathetic characterization of President Andrew Johnson is especially interesting. And finally, O'Toole *does* provide an answer to the ultimate question of whodunit, a name quite familiar to students of Nineteenth Century American history.

★★★★ Ruth Rendell: *Means of Evil,* Doubleday, $8.95. Among mystery writers to come on the scene in the last twenty years, Ruth Rendell is either number one or one of a handful of contenders for that spot. In this collection of five novelets, mostly from *EQMM,* about Chief Inspector Wexford, she proves she is equally at home at any length.

★★★ Michael Underwood: *Victim of Circumstance,* St. Martin's, $8.95. With the passing of Henry Cecil, Underwood offers the reader's best hope for an entertaining British trial, and he comes through in fine fashion in this trickily plotted account of murder in an English boys' school and the courtroom drama that follows. (The team of Nick and Clare Atwell are absent from this one, and I can't say I missed them.)

★★★ Joe L. Hensley: *Minor Murders,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $7.95. Hensley is an American specialist in legal backgrounds, though his Midwestern lawyer detective Donald Robak never gets into court in this one. His client is a sixteen-year-old epileptic girl accused of killing her foster parents, the operators of a somewhat sleazy home for juveniles. A local religious cult is also involved. The tale is fast-moving and readable with well realized characters and pointed social observations.

★★ Gordon DeMarco: *October Heat,* Germinal Press, 209 Prospect, San Francisco, CA 94110, $8.95. The latest private-eye period piece, set in California in 1934 and involving Upton Sinclair's campaign for governor, is the most overtly political mystery I've read since Richard S. Prather's *The Trojan Hearse* (1964), which was at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Riley Kovachs is a likeable character, and his left-wing preachments are only occasionally obtrusive. The mannered prose ranges from eloquent to incredibly corny. Guest stars include Charlie Chaplin, Harry Bridges, and Tom Mooney (an intriguing characterization), but not Sinclair, who is offstage throughout.

Among the reprints is a genuine classic, Richard Hull's 1934 comedy, *The Murder of My Aunt* (International Polygonics, $5.00), the richly ironic and deftly constructed account of a portly ne'er-do-well determined to do in a hated relative. Added features include wonderfully witty cover illustrations by Henry Cioch and an informative if irritating introduction by

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Burke N. Hare, whose general style is reflected in his choice of *nom de plume.*

Hardly classics but also blessed with some striking covers (by Stavrinos) are Gore Vidal's trio of detective novels as by Edgar Box, *Death in the Fifth Position* (1952), *Death Before Bedtime* (1953), and *Death Likes It Hot* (1954) (Random House-Vintage, $2.50 each). Public-relations man Peter Cutler Sargeant II is the narrator-sleuth in each, and his satiric observations outweigh the generally undistinguished plots. (For years before the true identity of Box was revealed, reprints of these books would carry the quote "Spillane in mink," attributed to Gore Vidal. The quote remains on one of these volumes, but it is now attributed to the *Saturday Review of Literature.*)

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Remember Edward Wellen's unusual and imaginative article titled "A Huddle of Armchairs," in our February 1973 issue? Now Jack Luzzatto offers another group of "criminous collective nouns," except that he presents his "collection" in the form of puzzles, each with a helpful clue . . .

FILL IN THE DASHES

by JACK LUZZATTO

Collective Nouns

1. A K _ _ of burglars
2. A R _ _ K of swindlers
3. A C _ _ _ _ H of stranglers
4. A Q _ _ _ _ R of cowards
5. A S _ _ _ of murderers.
6. A J _ _ _ _ E of pickpockets
7. A S _ _ _ _ H of kidnapers
8. A S _ _ _ of lawyers
9. An E _ _ _ _ _ _ _ N of terrorists
10. A P _ _ _ S of counterfeiters

Clues

1. Even for the "cat" type
2. And there goes a pigeon
3. I can't breathe!
4. All shook up
5. And there are lots of them
6. Someone is so rude!
7. It was all so fast
8. The appellation fits
9. They seem to be everywhere
10. All the money fit to print

(Answers on next page)

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Answers to Fill in the Dashes

1. A KIT of burglars
2. A ROOK of swindlers
3. A CLUTCH of stranglers
4. A QUIVER of cowards
5. A SLEW of murderers
6. A JOSTLE of pickpockets
7. A SNATCH of kidnapers
8. A SUIT of lawyers
9. An EXPLOSION of terrorists
10. A PRESS of counterfeiters

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MIXED REVIEW

by MARK GRENIER

Bragged a swell-headed actor named Bland,
"All the critics agree that I'm grand."
But his wife smashed his head
With a skillet; he's dead,
And his epitaph simply reads, "Panned."

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Cecile and Edward had an almost perfect marriage. It would have been absolutely perfect if Edward's work didn't take him away from home half of every month. In the two weeks Cecile was alone each month she did something—something strange—that, in the beginning, was "like a small act of betrayal" . . .

WEB OF CIRCUMSTANCE

by DONALD OLSON

Once they were married, a life apart from Edward seemed inconceivable to Cecile. She happily gave up her job to make a home for her husband in the pretty, gray-shingled bungalow on Wishing Tree Lane. To be a homemaker became her one and only ambition in life, and she dedicated herself to it with a spirit and efficiency that charmed the easygoing Edward. When he was shortly thereafter awarded a more lucrative sales territory in the furniture company that employed him, they were both delighted, even though it meant Edward would have to be away from home for two long weeks out of every month. But this would not last forever, and he promised that as soon as Cecile gave birth to their first child he would insist on being given a territory closer to home.

That Cecile was never to be able to bear children was the only disappointment in their marriage. Neither made any pretense of not caring, but they were so compatible, so much in love, and such reasonable, understanding, level-headed people they quickly adjusted to the reality of the situation, talked of eventually adopting a child or two, and happily settled into the pleasant routine of their lives. Edward's two-week absences only enhanced the joy of those periods when they were together; the years passed by swiftly and

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without a trace of discord. They considered themselves the luckiest of couples.

At 39, Cecile looked the same to Edward as on their wedding day, threads of gray hair and tiny fans of wrinkles at the corners of her blue eyes adding just the touch of attractive maturity to complement his thinning hair and blossoming stomach. Edward insisted that he did not go hungry while on the road for two weeks, but nonetheless he humored his wife by doing more than justice to the elaborate meals she cooked for him each and every day he was home.

At dinner his first day home in June, Edward asked, as usual, if anything had happened while he was away. Cecile told him about the new neighbors.

"Their names are Chester—Philip and Maribel. They're a little younger than us. Philip's an accountant—works at home. He's very good-looking. I see him lifting weights on their patio. I haven't met her, but he's very pleasant."

Edward showed surprise. Cecile was always so shy and retiring he couldn't imagine her becoming so quickly acquainted. Cecile explained that Philip Chester had come to the house one morning, steaming about the impossibility of having a phone installed right away, and asking if in the meantime he might impose on Cecile. The only other close neighbors were on an extended vacation trip.

Later, while Cecile was showing Edward what she'd been doing in the garden while he was away, Philip Chester appeared on the other side of the hedge separating the two backyards. Cecile introduced the two men. Edward saw that Philip Chester was quite as handsome as Cecile had described—tall, broad-shouldered, with thick blond hair and a charming smile.

"I'm ever so obliged to your wife for letting me use your phone. I tried to tell those idiots at the phone company I couldn't run my business without one."

Philip asked about Edward's work. Edward flung an arm around Cecile's waist and said how much he envied Philip for being able to work at home. The younger man responded with a mildly cynical smile. "Believe me, it has its drawbacks."

Afterward Cecile told Edward that Philip Chester had as much as admitted that his wife was addicted to the bottle. "I heard them arguing one night. She sounded like a royal nag. And Philip's so pleasant, didn't you think?"

"Oh, very."

When Edward next arrived home from his road trip and asked

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about the Chesters, Cecile replied that she still hadn't met Maribel and had done no more than exchange waves over the hedge with Philip, now that his own phone had been installed.

The day before Edward left was Cecile's birthday, and among his other gifts to her was a handsome diary with a tooled leather cover imprinted with her name.

"Edward, it's beautiful, but how on earth could I fill those big pages? Nothing ever happens to me except housework and gardening."

Edward gave her an affectionate squeeze. "That's the whole idea. I worry about you when I'm away, all alone here with so little to occupy your time. I want you to get out more, do things. Let these blank pages encourage you."

"Sweetheart, I've no desire to *do* things. I love our home and our garden. It's enough. I'm completely satisfied."

"Cecie, you're one in a million."

"So are you, Edward. What did we do to deserve such happiness?"

"That's easy. We found each other."

What Edward had said lingered in her mind, however, when she was once more alone. That she suffered spells of acute loneliness was true enough, but she'd always consoled herself with the knowledge that Edward would soon be home and two weeks of solitude was a small price to pay for the pleasure they would enjoy in each other's company. But then one sultry June afternoon, when she couldn't find a weed in the garden or a speck of dust in the house, Cecile settled herself on the porch glider and listlessly made a few jottings in the diary.

"Had breakfast. Drove to the market. Mended Edward's shirt. Finished my library book." These few lines occupied scarcely a quarter page. She smiled, sighed, and tossed the book down. Beyond the hedge she could see Philip Chester, dressed only in a pair of shorts that displayed his superb muscular development, playing with his poodle in the backyard. A moment later Maribel Chester, in a flowered housecoat, appeared on the patio. Cecile heard her scream at her husband: "You care more for that imbecilic *dog* than you ever did for me!" And then, to Cecile's astonished horror, the woman raised her arm and flung something at her husband. It flashed in the sun, sailed over the hedge, and landed in Cecile's bed of lupines.

Such a violation of the quiet summer afternoon was to Cecile like a glimpse into a private hell. She felt a sudden excess of joy at her

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own happily uneventful life, and a fresh awareness of her good fortune in having married Edward.

Philip Chester skirted the end of the hedge and carefully stepped among the flowers to retrieve what Cecile now saw to be a whiskey bottle. He looked up, saw her standing on the porch, and made a hapless, apologetic gesture in her direction. She felt very sorry for him.

Idly she again took up the diary and after a moment's thought proceeded to write a brief account of the incident. It would amuse Edward. Then, scarcely aware of what impulse prompted it, she added, "Philip came over and apologized for his wife's behavior. He was truly mortified. I invited him up on the porch for lemonade. He poured out to me all the miserable details of his life with that woman. But he didn't dare stay too long. She's insanely jealous."

Cecile reread the lines, was overcome with shame at her foolishness, and ripped the page from the book. From deep within her consciousness there filtered the memory of a schoolgirl crush on Mr. Erb, her sixth-grade math teacher, and those adolescent fantasies she'd confided to that long-forgotten earlier diary. But to be guilty of such whimsy at this time of life filled her with remorse. Whatever would Edward think? It was like a small act of betrayal, and only because to do so would attach too great a significance to the folly, she refrained from tossing the diary into the trash can.

Loneliness, however, no matter how ruthlessly denied, is a condition of the heart having nothing to do with reason, and when rain the following day prevented Cecile from spending any time in the garden, and when her bit of ironing and dusting left most of the day unoccupied, she lapsed into a mood of vague dissatisfaction. When the phone rang, she seized it eagerly, hoping it might be Edward, who would occasionally call if time permitted, or at least her friend Helen Bentley. Instead, it was a wrong number. She wandered out to the porch and stood gazing over the boxes of geraniums toward the Chester house, where she discerned no signs of life.

Mindlessly she walked back inside and found herself at her little writing desk, the diary open before her. She picked up the pen and started writing.

"Philip just called. Said his wife was away and could he come over. Said he desperately needed someone to talk to, and I was the most understanding person he'd ever met. I told him I didn't think it would be a good idea."

She felt a hot flush of guilt as she scanned what she'd written.

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Lunacy. Sheer lunacy. She started to shut the book, yet that blank expanse of page stared up at her challengingly. Once more the pen moved. "I was on the point of hanging up, however poor Philip sounded truly desperate. It would have been unkind to deny him a sympathetic ear. I agreed he might pop over for a few minutes. Oh, how distraught he looked. Said he couldn't possibly go on working in the house with Maribel raging at him constantly. I suggested he take an office downtown, but he said he couldn't afford it. He claimed to feel much better after talking to me. I was glad I'd been of help."

Thus began a habit that became as compulsive to Cecile as no doubt was Maribel Chester's drinking problem. The sense of shame gradually evaporated, for after all there was nothing to feel *guilty* about. A silly, harmless diversion, that's all it was, as innocent as a game of solitaire. She certainly harbored no secret passion for Philip Chester. Aggressively handsome men had never attracted her. She loved Edward and only Edward.

Nevertheless, the entries in the diary grew longer and longer, inevitably acquiring a moderately romantic cast.

"When Philip left today he surprised me with an unexpected kiss on the cheek. He could see I was offended. He apologized, but when I told him I couldn't possibly see him again he became boyishly contrite. Insisted he couldn't bear to be deprived of my 'shoulder to cry on,' as he put it. At last I relented, so long as he promised to behave himself."

Later in the week: "Philip ran into me at the market. Claimed it was accidental. Said his car was disabled and could he bum a ride home. But then he suggested we take a ride in the country, it was such a lovely day. We drove and talked for hours. He admitted the story about his car was a fib. When we parked and went for a walk in Allen Park he tried to kiss me. I'm determined never to see him again."

But of course she did, and in the weeks ahead, according to her diary, she saw Philip almost every day. Then when Edward came home she tried to atone for this imaginary betrayal by treating him with excessive affection, alarmed that he might detect something in her manner that might betray a guilty conscience. However, he merely remarked on how well she was looking, what a fresh color all the gardening seemed to be putting in her cheeks. Before he left, Cecile vowed to herself that she would burn the ridiculous diary as soon as he was gone.

Instead, it remained the high point of her day, and she would eke

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out the pleasure it excited in her by inscribing only a few lines at a time, in between her household activities, and saving a good quarter page for the evening.

One day there came a knock on the door and when she opened it to find herself staring into Philip Chester's wide blue eyes she blushed scarlet.

"Sorry to bother you, Mrs. Welland. Seems we've blown a fuse and are fresh out. Wonder if we could borrow one from you."

"A fuse? Oh—I—er—no, I'm sorry. We don't use them. Only circuit breakers." Which was untrue, but she was too flustered to allow him into the house. He looked at her strangely.

"Anything wrong, Mrs. Welland?"

"What? No, no. I was about to take something out of the oven. Please excuse me." And she all but slammed the door in his face.

Later, in her diary: "Philip came to the door with some excuse about a fuse. I didn't dare let him in. This thing has gone far enough."

Yet soon she was agreeing in her imagination to accompany Philip on longer and longer excursions to neighboring communities, to picnics, museum visits, and on woodland walks. Eventually her sympathy for the beleaguered husband overcame her scruples.

"Philip came over, a trifle tight. Said that Maribel is beginning to suspect something, but he doesn't care. I'd never seen him so moody and downcast. I couldn't help myself. It simply happened. I was heartsick afterward, thinking of Edward. *It must not happen again.*"

Of course, it did.

Then something most disturbing happened just before Edward went back on the road following his two weeks at home late in July. One of the handles on his aging two-suiter had broken and he asked Cecile to leave it at the luggage store in town to be repaired. Meanwhile, he would drag out his other old suitcase and use that. Cecile thought no more about it until, just before leaving, he came lugging it downstairs.

"Oh, you found it," she said. "Was it in the attic?"

"No. In the closet."

Even then nothing registered, and it was only after he'd driven away that the thought struck her: the closet! Good heavens, that's where she kept the diary hidden. She rushed upstairs and pulled on the light. An oblong space in the film of dust showed where the old suitcase had been sitting, directly beneath the shelf where she kept the diary.

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She had no way of knowing if the diary had been disturbed, and persuaded herself that it was most unlikely Edward might have noticed it there, and even if he had would probably not have touched it, although he might logically have wondered why she had secreted it there.

She awaited his return in a state of mild trepidation, and tried to believe it was no more than her imagination that accounted for what she believed to be a shade of reticence in his manner. He seemed, indeed, unusually quiet at dinner that evening.

"Is everything all right, darling?" she forced herself to ask. "Roast the way you like it?"

"Perfect. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know. You seem quiet."

"A grueling two weeks. Business isn't what it should be. Or maybe I'm losing my touch."

Relieved, she did her utmost to cheer him up. "Oh, Edward, isn't it time you stopped being on the road so much? It was different when you were younger. Couldn't you stay home more?"

"Would you really like that, Cecie?"

Did his tone betray a faint irony? No, it was only her imagination. It had to be.

"You *know* I would, Edward. Sometimes, when I'm alone all those days, I get frightened."

"Of what?"

"Oh, not of *things*. Burglars, anything like that. But of—loneliness. Sometimes it scares me."

He touched his napkin to his lips. "What are you trying to tell me, dearest?"

Surprising her quite as much as it did him, she burst into tears. Alarmed, he did his best to comfort her.

"Oh, Edward, if only you could stay *home*."

"Now, now, Cecie. You've been such a fine brave girl all these years. So understanding. I'd no idea it affected you so much, being alone."

Gradually she composed herself, apologized for being so weak and foolish. Yet there remained a barely palpable strain in the atmosphere until Edward departed.

Three days later, while she was on the porch watering the geraniums, Cecile heard the sound of a siren on the next street, and a few minutes later was astonished to see a number of men, three in police uniforms, milling about the Chesters' backyard and patio.

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Curious, she walked across the lawn and peeped over the hedge. One of the plainclothesmen saw her and came forward.

"Is something wrong?" she inquired. "Has there been an accident?"

The man asked her name and said he'd be around to question her presently. When he came to her door she invited him into the living room. He identified himself as a Lieutenant Gregg of the detective force and quickly apprised her of what had happened: Philip Chester had allegedly returned home after an afternoon's fishing to find his wife dead.

Cecile's hand flew to her lips. "Dead? *Maribel*?"

"Strangled," he said impassively.

In a daze Cecile answered his questions. No, she didn't know the Chesters well at all, had never met Maribel, and spoken to Philip only on rare occasions. She explained about the telephone. And no, she'd heard nothing, no commotion of any sort, that afternoon. When pressed, she denied knowing anything about the Chesters' domestic relations. As she said this, Cecile tried unsuccessfully not to blush. Nor could she keep a slight stammer out of her voice. All she could think of were those fictional indiscretions she'd confided to her diary, and she felt sure the detective must be aware of her discomfiture.

When Edward came home and wanted all the details, Cecile referred him to the newspapers which she had saved. He read through them in absorbed silence as Cecile tried to concentrate on her knitting.

Later Edward went upstairs to his den to work on his bimonthly sales reports, and when he rejoined Cecile the details of the murder apparently remained on his mind.

"According to the papers, it happened sometime on the afternoon of the fourteenth," he remarked.

"Yes."

"Do you think he did it? One gets the idea he's the prime suspect."

"I can't believe that. You met him, Edward. He seemed such a pleasant man."

"Well, you'd know more about that than I would."

Her eyes jumped to meet his. He was regarding her with a placid, apparently unexceptional, curiosity.

"Me?"

"Well, you got to know him during all that phone business."

"Really, Edward, I hardly got to *know* him." She lowered her eyes and concentrated furiously on her knitting.

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"Chester claims he was fishing all that afternoon. Only there's no one to back him up."

"If he's telling the truth, I'm sure someone will be able to verify it."

Edward sniffed. "Funny. He didn't strike me as the sportsman type."

"I don't know. He was always using those barbells on their patio."

"Vanity, not sport."

No doubt about it, Edward's tone was frankly damaging to Philip Chester's character. It wasn't like Edward. Cecile lost track of her stitches, flung the knitting aside, and went into the kitchen to prepare dinner.

That evening Edward took a walk and when he came home Cecile noticed at once how very pale he looked. "Edward? Are you all right?"

He took her hand and led her to the sofa. "Cecie, darling, I'm afraid I've done something quite inexcusable."

"Oh, Edward, not you."

"I never meant you to know. Cecie, you know how much I love you. Whatever happens, you must never forget that. I wouldn't for the life of me do anything to cause you the slightest unpleasantness."

Cecile was too disturbed to do more than stare blankly into his soft brown eyes. Edward's expression was thoughtful, almost philosophic.

"Remember, Cecie, when I had to fish my old suitcase out of the closet?"

Cecile caught her breath and held it. Edward's gaze grew even more compassionate. "I happened to see that diary I'd bought you sitting on the closet shelf. My dearest, I didn't mean to read it. I was amused that you hadn't used it. Then I saw that you had. Oh, my dear, I'd never have opened it if I'd thought there was anything you didn't want me to read."

"Edward, Edward. *Why* did you have to read it?"

"Believe me, I wish I hadn't."

She seized his hand. "Edward, it's not true. None of it is true. It was—it was, oh, silly, stupid make-believe. I swear."

"Cecie, don't. I understand. I really do. I know what loneliness can be like. I blame myself utterly. And you did your best to discourage him. That was perfectly clear. You can't help being the warm, understanding woman you are. It's why I love you."

Appalled, Cecile leaped to her feet. "Edward, stop! Oh, dear heart,

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as God is my witness, it is *not true.* Do you think I could ever be unfaithful to *you*? Never! Never! It was pure fantasy. I wouldn't take Philip Chester on a silver platter."

He tried to soothe her as he would a child. "Dearest Cecie, I tell you I understand. I forgive you. You were tempted beyond endurance. You don't have to pretend—"

"Pretending is what I *was* doing, Edward. I'm telling you the honest truth. It did not happen. Any of it. I swear."

Edward stirred uncomfortably. "Cecie, listen. I went to see Philip Chester tonight."

"You didn't."

"I had to, darling. He denied everything, of course. He laughed. He seemed only amused. And then I told him I had proof—your diary—"

"No!"

"I'd looked in your diary again yesterday. If you were with him as you said, all that day at Valley Ridge, he couldn't have murdered his wife."

Cecile had the sensation of reaching the brink of a dangerously high cliff and then falling numbly through space. Her voice lost its passion in the breathlessness of her fall. "He wasn't with me. He wasn't ever with me."

Edward sighed. She could see in his eyes the reflection of her own despair. With a muffled cry she turned from him and fled up the stairs to her bedroom.

Edward woke her late the following morning. "Come downstairs, Cecie. Lieutenant Gregg is waiting to see you."

The detective regarded her with apparent indifference to her ravaged appearance. "Philip Chester tells us you can prove he was nowhere near his house the afternoon his wife was killed. Something about a diary."

Cecile looked wanly from Edward to Gregg. "No. He denied there was anything between us. Ask my husband."

"Evidently, he's decided he'd rather have an alibi than go on shielding you."

Cecile stared at her husband. "Oh, Edward, what have you done?"

"Darling, it's your duty to show Lieutenant Gregg your diary. If you can give this man an alibi it would be morally wrong to withhold the information. He's promised to do all he can to keep you out of it, so long as you cooperate."

Gregg extended his hand. "The diary, Mrs. Welland?"

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Cecile dragged herself upstairs to the closet and fetched the loathsome diary, hating the feel of it in her damp fingers. Gregg hastily skimmed through it, then looked up at her. "You understand this doesn't prove Chester's story. The two of you could have set it up in advance. We'll have to locate witnesses who can verify that the two of you were together in Valley Ridge."

Cecile shook her head. "You won't find any witnesses. There aren't any. I was never in Valley Ridge that day. Certainly not with Philip Chester. I've never been anywhere with Philip Chester."

When Gregg had departed, Cecile regarded Edward with a despairing look. "He didn't believe me. Any more than you did."

They heard nothing for two days. Edward tried to behave normally, to demonstrate by his attitude that he did truly understand and harbored no resentment against Cecile, but all he succeeded in creating was that atmosphere of excessive politeness that exists between strangers.

When Gregg next arrived, he made an extraordinary request. "We're still checking for witnesses. In the meantime, Mr. Welland, I'd be obliged if you'd allow me to take an impression of your fingerprints."

Edward stared. "Mine? Whatever for?"

"A friend of Maribel Chester's has come forward with information that the dead woman phoned her the morning she was strangled. She told this friend that she'd learned she was right about her husband having an affair with another woman. She said she was going to make Philip Chester sorry he'd ever been born."

Cecile clung now to Edward's hand. "You didn't go to her, did you, Edward?"

"No, of course not."

"As a matter of routine, Mr. Welland, we must check your prints against a couple of those still unidentified in the Chester house. And I trust you can account for your whereabouts the day she was murdered?"

"I can give you a list of all my accounts."

Cecile was by now in such a state of mental distraction that the entire web of circumstances acquired a comic dreadful unreality. "Lieutenant Gregg, you can't for a minute suspect *Edward*. What possible motive could he have for killing Maribel Chester? It's preposterous."

"I didn't say he was a suspect, Mrs. Welland. But as for that, it's not inconceivable that your husband might have gone to the Chester

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house, that Mrs. Chester might have threatened to expose you as her husband's lover, and that to prevent it . . . as I say, every possibility must be explored."

When they were alone, Cecile could no longer hold back the sobs she had fought to suppress while the detective was present. "Oh, Edward, what a dreadful mess I've got you into, all because of a silly, crazy whim. How can you ever forgive me? You should be furious. Any other man would despise me for what I've done."

"How could I despise you, Cecie? I love you. I've told you again and again that I understand the sort of loneliness that drove you to get mixed up with this man."

"But you *don't* understand. You refuse to believe the truth. If only you could believe that the diary was no more than a record of nonsensical daydreams."

On Thursday, Lieutenant Gregg paid them another call. His features were locked in an expression of official gravity.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I have a warrant here for your arrest, Mr. Welland."

"No!" It burst like a scream from Cecile's lips. "No, that's impossible! There's been some horrible mistake. Edward could never kill anyone. Oh, if only you knew him as I do, Lieutenant. I've ruined his life, all because I wrote those insane lies in that diary. I was *lonely*. You've no idea what loneliness can do to a person."

Cecile turned to Edward and grasped his hand in both of hers. "Oh, Edward, Edward, I was so selfish. If only I'd thought of *your* loneliness. At least I was here in our own home. I wasn't forced to spend days and days with virtual strangers, sleeping and eating in dreary motels. And you never complained. Not once in all those years. Oh, tell him, Edward. Tell him you didn't harm that woman."

Edward's face was drained of color. "I didn't, Cecie. Of course I didn't. I swear it."

"Didn't you check his alibi, Lieutenant? Didn't you talk to all those people on the road?"

"We did."

"Then how can you charge him with murder?"

The detective's face lost a bit of its official impassivity. "I didn't say we were charging him with murder, Mrs. Welland. We finally broke down Chester's story. He *had* been having an affair with another woman. We've already questioned her. Chester's confessed to strangling his wife."

A cry of joy broke from Cecile's lips. "But in that case, why—"

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"We checked out your husband's alibi more thoroughly than he may have expected." Gregg reached into his pocket and handed Cecile a photograph. "I'm sorry. I suppose we all have our ways of coping with loneliness."

Cecile stared at the picture, but Edward's was the only face that meant anything to her. She felt his arm gently encircle her waist. When he spoke, his voice expressed an anguished sorrow of regret at having to hurt her.

"Boy looks like me, doesn't he, Cecie? A fine lad. And you'd like Irene. She's a lot like you. Both so understanding."

Cecile raised her eyes imploringly to the detective's face. Gregg cleared his throat.

"The charge against your husband is not murder, Mrs. Welland. It's bigamy."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

When A. Conan Doyle's MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *was first published in the United States, in 1894, the earliest issue of the book contained a story titled "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box." At Doyle's insistence this first issue was recalled, and a second issue was published with "The Cardboard Box" omitted. The story did not appear again in the United States for 23 years, when it was included in the American first edition of Doyle's* HIS LAST BOW, *in 1917.*

Do we know Doyle's reason for the suppression of "The Cardboard Box" in 1894? It has been claimed that Doyle believed that the story was too gruesome, that the reading public of 1894 would be shocked by the grisly details.

In the Sherlock Holmes story a Miss Cushing of Cross Street, Croydon, receives a small packet, wrapped in brown paper, sent by parcel post from Belfast. Inside is a yellow cardboard box, originally a half-pound box of honeydew tobacco, now filled with coarse salt covering two freshly severed human ears.

Too gruesome for the reading public of 1894?

Now, 86 years later, Hugh Pentecost gives us "Jericho and the Cardboard Box." Will the reading public of 1980 find this story too gruesome?

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JERICHO AND THE CARDBOARD BOX

by HUGH PENTECOST

It was a Sunday morning when Jericho found the box outside the door of his studio in Jefferson Mews in Greenwich Village. It was an almost square cardboard carton designed to hold twelve quart bottles of whiskey. The name of the distiller was stamped on the side and on the top of the carton. The top was closed and held in place by packaging tape. It rested on top of the Sunday *Times* and the Sunday *News* which Jericho had home-delivered. It appeared to be intended for Jericho though it wasn't addressed to him in any way. He moved it, realizing that it didn't contain its original contents of liquor—it was much too light for that. But if it wasn't meant for him, why else would it be there?

John Jericho is a giant of a man, six feet four inches tall with a body that is 240 pounds of hard, conditioned muscle. His hair, his beard and mustache, are a flaming red, which give him the look of an ancient Viking warrior. He has been called an "original," and he is—no duplicate, no carbon copy anywhere. He is, by profession, an artist. His paintings, noted for their vivid colors, their enormous vitality that seems to leap at you from the canvas, are to be seen in museums and private collections all over the world.

But Jericho is more than a gifted painter. Some art critics say his works suffer because they always carry a message. The message, in a world of violence and terror, of assassinations and mass murders, is an outcry against man's inhumanity to man. But he is more than just the conveyer of messages. He confronts evil where he can find it and fights it eye to eye, toe to toe. The fact that he is alive and well and living in Greenwich Village in New York City tells you all you need to know about those confrontations. There are people who love him, and there are people who hate his guts.

A gift from someone he had helped was not unusual. He picked up the newspapers and the cardboard carton and carried them into the studio. He was wearing only a terry-cloth robe over his naked

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body, fresh from a shower. From the kitchen off his skylighted studio came the pleasant aroma of fresh cooked bacon and coffee.

He picked up a palette knife from the table beside his easel and slit the strips of package tape on the carton. He opened the box. He stepped back, taking a deep breath to fight off a wave of nausea.

"Time to put in your eggs, love?" a pleasant girl's voice called to him from the kitchen.

"Stay out of here, Marla!" Jericho called out, his voice harsh.

He looked into the open carton once more. Leering up at him from a bed of bloodied newspaper was the severed head of an old woman.

Lieutenant Mark Kreevich, Manhattan Homicide, is one of a new breed of cops. He is a man with a law degree. He is a man with sophisticated tastes in the arts; he can talk painting or literature or the theater. He is also a man dedicated to "law and order," but not the cliché kind of law and order paid lip service by politicians. It is his belief that people have a right to live without fear; if possible, crime should be prevented rather than solved after the fact.

It is not illogical that this slim, intense, highly competent crime fighter was the official John Jericho called when he had recovered from the first shock of seeing what was in the cardboard box. Kreevich and Jericho were long-standing friends, dating back to a murder case on which their paths had crossed some years ago.

Kreevich, his face looking, for the moment, as though it was carved out of stone, turned away from the open carton. "You know who she is?" he asked.

"Yes and no," Jericho said.

"Meaning?"

"She's an old bag lady who haunts this part of town," Jericho said. "I don't know her name or anything about her. I've spoken to her on the street."

"About what?"

" 'Good morning,' 'Have a good day.' That sort of thing."

A girl came out of the kitchen. She looked like what she was, a beautiful fashion model. She had long red hair that she wore shoulder-length, an elegant figure, high cheekbones, a wide generous mouth, bright blue eyes. She was carrying two mugs of coffee which she put down on the table next to the carton, keeping her eyes averted.

"What's a bag lady, Johnny?" she asked.

"She's an old crone who lives, God knows where, in the neigh-

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borhood—probably in some deserted building or cellar. You see her on the street, always carrying paper bags, sifting through trash and garbage, always searching for something that will contribute to survival. A scavenger." Jericho glanced at Kreevich. "You remember Marla Rivers, Mark."

The detective managed a thin smile "We all had too many drinks at Connolly's Bar and Grill a few months back," he said.

"You don't like Picasso," Marla said.

"I admire him but I don't want to live with him," Kreevich said.

"Sugar? Cream?" Marla asked him.

"In this kind of situation I take it black," Kreevich said. He took a sip of the hot coffee. "Without the rest of the lady it's impossible to tell what happened to her. Did the beheading kill her or was it done afterward? The thing that interests me, Johnny, is why your doorstep on a summer Sunday morning?"

"It beats me," Jericho said.

The front doorbell buzzer rang.

"That could be Captain Cardwell of the local precinct," Kreevich said. "I asked him to join me here—Department protocol."

Captain Tom Cardwell was a gray-haired man with cold, slate-gray eyes. He looked a little bulky, out of shape, in his police captain's uniform. Jericho knew him. The part of Greenwich Village in which Jefferson Mews is located is somewhat old-fashioned in today's world. It is like a small town, where everyone knows everyone, everyone speaks to everyone, almost everyone knows what everyone else does. Police in this area, unlike most of the city, are still regarded as friends and allies, not the enemy.

Tom Cardwell, near retirement age Jericho guessed, had spent his whole career in this part of town. He was feared by some, liked and respected by many. Under his command, drunks were usually taken home, not thrown into jail; people in trouble often went to him for help. Down-and-outers, an old bag lady like the one whose head was in the box, were not molested so long as they didn't make themselves obnoxious to other residents. Cardwell's precinct was considered to be too gently paternalistic by the higher-ups in the department, but the crime rate was low and he was allowed to run things his own way.

Cardwell acknowledged an introduction to Marla Rivers as though he had never seen her before, though Jericho would have bet he knew that she spent frequent weekends here in this studio. Cardwell knew everything that went on in his own little world.

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Kreevich took the Captain over to the carton and opened the lid. Cardwell looked down and they could hear his breath whistle.

"Sarah Watson!" he said.

"You know her?" Kreevich asked.

"Lived down here for years," Cardwell said. "Bag lady. Never did anybody any harm that I know of. What kind of swine would do this?"

"What kind of swine would put it in a box and leave it for me?" Jericho asked.

"You know Sarah?" Cardwell asked.

"The way I know a hundred people in this neighborhood," Jericho said. "I wave, I say hello. Don't know names." He glanced at the carton. "I never heard her name until you just mentioned it."

"Looks so old," Kreevich said.

"In her eighties, I imagine," Cardwell said. "She was already part of the picture in this neighborhood when I was assigned to this precinct thirty-five years ago. Even then she was living out of garbage cans." He shook his head. "Ten days from retirement and this gets dropped in my lap."

"Living out of garbage cans?" Marla sounded shocked. "Aren't there organizations that take care of people like that? The Salvation Army, for instance?"

Cardwell allowed himself a bitter little chuckle. "Tough old bird, Sarah Watson. Wouldn't have her life any other way. Fought off an army of do-gooders in her time. Not starving to death, you understand. Would you believe she was a crazy, wild horse player? Every day of her life, betting on the nags, putting down her two bucks."

"That old woman?" Marla asked.

"Yes, didn't miss a day," Cardwell said. "Before we had Off Track Betting she knew where to find an illegal bookie. I understand she does pretty well—did pretty well. They say she picked winners for dozens of people every day in this area."

"A Damon Runyon character," Kreevich said.

Cardwell squared his shoulders. "Job now is to—to find the rest of her," he said. "I'd like to send a man up here to fingerprint that carton before we move it, Mr. Jericho."

"Sure. Of course I handled it, not dreaming—"

"You won't mind letting my man take your prints so we can separate them from any others that may be on the carton?"

"Of course not."

"Is it okay if I use your telephone?" Cardwell asked. "You'll have

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to live with—with that—for another half hour."

"Not exactly the kind of Sunday I'd planned," Jericho said to Marla Rivers. They were alone in the studio with the carton. Kreevich had taken off with Captain Cardwell.

"There will be other Sundays, other days, love," Marla said. Her cool fingers touched his bearded cheek. "You don't have any idea why—that—that horror was left for you to find?"

"Two explanations," he said. "First, it wasn't meant for me at all. Just put down at random, somewhere, anywhere. Happened to be outside my door, but not meant for anyone in particular. Someone just getting rid of it."

"You believe that?"

"No," Jericho said, scowling. "Second, it was meant to tell me something, but I can't read the message yet."

"But if you didn't know her, if she wasn't even a casual acquaintance—?"

"Somebody knows something about me," Jericho said.

"What, Johnny?"

"That I never let a violence go unpunished if I can help it."

"Why you? Why not the police?"

"Good question," Jericho said.

Two detectives came from the precinct house with fingerprint equipment. They dusted the carton and took off what they found. Many different prints, they told Jericho. He submitted to having his own prints taken, and the two detectives left, carrying the carton and its grisly contents with them.

"Alone at last!" Marla said, but somehow it wasn't funny.

"Interesting to know when it was left outside my door," Jericho mused.

"It wasn't there when we came in for dinner, which was about ten thirty." Her eyes widened. "It was put there while we were—!"

"Yes, darling," Jericho said. "I've always said that the ultimate siren for the hydrogen bomb could sound while I was with you and I wouldn't hear it."

"Flattery will get you anything," Marla said. "What about the paper boy?"

"What about him?"

"He'd know whether the carton was there when he brought the Sunday papers. Then you'd know something about when it was left."

Jericho bent down and kissed her. "I may have to marry you to

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make you a permanent partner. See you when I get back!"

The word was evidently out in the neighborhood. When Jericho reached the street a dozen people were grouped across the way, obviously interested in Number 16. He was instantly surrounded by people babbling questions. He had no answers, not yet. One thing he learned from his inquisitive neighbors. The story was already being broadcast on the local radio stations. *Bag lady decapitated in Jefferson Mews.*

Jericho walked down the block to Angelo Gambini's newspaper and notion store on the corner. Angelo, a stout, always smiling man, was not himself this morning. He crossed himself when he saw Jericho come in from the street.

"Mr. Jericho! I hear it on the radio. Someone leave you Sarah Watson's head in a box. *Dio mio*!"

"I wanted to talk to your boy, Tony," Jericho said. "I want to ask him if the box was there when he delivered the papers. If the box was brought after he delivered, then it was brought in daylight. If so, the person who delivered it could have been seen."

"Oh, it is there when Tony take you your papers," Angelo said. "When he hear about it on the radio Tony tell me. I send him straight down to report to Captain Cardwell."

"Report what?"

"That the box is there when he come with your papers. He lift it up and put papers under. His fingerprints, they are on the box, so I know he must tell Cardwell before he is suspected of something."

So the carton could have been delivered any time in the night, after ten thirty when Jericho and Marla had come in from dinner. Darkness, in the early hours of the morning, would have reduced any risk that the deliverer had to run.

"Who were Sarah Watson's close friends?" Jericho asked.

Angelo shrugged. "She have many friends," he said. "But close friends? Who knows? She give tips to many people on the horse races. If tips pay off, the people give her ten percent of winnings. You never know from looking at her, walking around in rags and carrying paper bags, that she may be better off than some fine gentlemen we see going to office."

"Carried her money with her?"

Angelo laughed. "She come in to buy something she have to half undress to pay for it. Money inside stockings, inside underclothes. I kid her about being a stripper. 'Nothing much to look at when

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you're eighty,' she tell me."

"So people knew she carried money. Could be a motive for attacking her, and killing her if she resisted."

Angelo nodded. "You find the body, if there's no money on it you'll know."

"No real close friends?" Jericho persisted.

"There is old Dave Morris," Angelo said. "Old-time Bowery bum. Drink anything that you can light a match to—canned heat, you name it. I suppose he's around sixty, but he look older. Sarah treat him like a kid—like maybe she is his nursemaid. Pull him out of alleys when he is drunk so cops not find him, scrounge food for him, find places where he sleep it off. I say he owes her that he's alive. I suppose you say that's close."

"Where can I find him?" Jericho asked.

"Who knows? No regular place to stay. He may not know what happen. He sure don't have a radio."

At that moment the little radio on the shelf behind Angelo announced local news: "The police have made an arrest in the case of the Greenwich Village bag lady who was found murdered early this morning. David Morris, a down-and-outer, has been charged with the murder and decapitation of Sarah Watson. More details as they develop."

"Well, I guess he know what happen," Angelo said.

Captain Cardwell was in good humor when Jericho walked into his office at the precinct house.

"We got lucky," he said.

"You're certain Morris is guilty?" Jericho asked.

"You won't believe what I've got to tell you," Cardwell said. "Radio did the job for us. Fred Thomas, who is vice-president in charge of the branch of the Waring Trust Company here in the Village, heard the news and called me. Five days ago—last Tuesday—Sarah Watson opened an account at his bank. Would you like to guess how much?"

"A few hundred dollars?"

Cardwell picked up a note from his desk.

"Sixty-one thousand two hundred and forty-two dollars and eighty-nine cents."

"You're kidding!"

"Exactly that amount. Mr. Thomas was just as astounded as you are. In cash, mind you! Old, old lady. He asked her what would

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become of the money if anything happened to her. Did she have a will? She didn't, but she made out a will right there in his office, instructed by the bank's lawyer, and all duly signed, and she left the whole wad, sixty-odd thousand bucks, to David Morris. You need a better motive for a down-and-out bum?"

"That's all you've got? A motive?"

Cardwell laughed cheerfully. "Just the beginning," he said. "We found Morris, potted to the gills, passed out cold, in the cellar of a deserted house on West 12th Street. Blood all over his clothes. We carted him back here, too drunk to talk. We fingerprinted him. Would you believe his prints are all over that carton that was left outside your front door?"

"Does he admit he left it for me?"

"He doesn't say anything yet that makes any sense. But I don't think we need him to talk. The Medical Examiner is making tests. If the blood on his clothes matches Sarah Watson's, and I'll bet my life it does, it's open and shut."

"Have you found Sarah's body?"

"Still looking. We'll come up with it."

Jericho brought his fist down on Cardwell's desk. "Why would he deliver that head to me? May I talk to him?"

"It won't do any good," Cardwell said. "He makes no sense. But if you can stand the smell—"

The cell was reasonably clean; toilet, basin, a cot on which appeared to be a bundle of old rags. The smell of stale booze was almost overpowering.

"Morris!" Jericho said sharply.

The rags moved. A bleary-eyed, unshaved face turned into view. "Mr. Jericho." It was like the whisper of a prizefighter who has been hit many times on the Adam's apple.

"You sent me a bizarre message," Jericho said.

Dave Morris' rumpled head moved up and down in the affirmative.

"You killed Sarah Watson?"

The head shook in an almost vigorous negative.

"Do you have a lawyer, Morris? Because they've got you nailed to the barn door."

Again the negative head shake. Then: "A lawyer wouldn't be any use."

"Why did you leave that carton outside my studio?"

The rags propped themselves up on an elbow. A bony finger beckoned Jericho close. "Don't you know," Morris whispered, "that this

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cell is bugged?" The rags sank back on the cot, then turned away.

Back in Cardwell's office the Captain spread his hands in an I-told-you-so gesture. "Has to present a defense whether he wants to or not. The court will appoint someone." He chuckled. "Pretty smart cookie to know we had him wired for sound."

"Smarter than me," Jericho said, irritated that he hadn't been told.

"Played a hunch," Cardwell said. "Thought he might spill something."

Fred Thomas, manager and vice-president of the Village Branch of the Waring Trust Company, was not a stranger to Jericho. The artist kept a checking account at the bank. There had been a time when the Zabriskis, who ran a mom-and-pop fruit-and-vegetable store, had come to Jericho for help. They needed $2000 for repairs to their refrigeration system. Would Jericho go on a note for them at the bank? Jericho would, and went to the bank to talk to Fred Thomas.

"You don't have to go on a note for the Zabriskis," Thomas said. "I know them—they're part of my community. Their credit is good with me. Of course, if they asked for my advice I'd be bound to tell them they're involved in a losing war. The big chain supermarkets are going to roll over them, as certainly as death and taxes. But unless they insist on an opinion I'm not going to hurt their pride. Forty years in that one store—"

Jericho registered Thomas in the back of his mind as a good man. He needed the banker's help now.

Thomas lived in a ground-floor garden apartment on Jane Street. He didn't seem altogether surprised to see Jericho outside his front door.

"I had a feeling you might be wanting to talk to me, Mr. Jericho," he said. "Please come in." He led the way to the garden where the Sunday newspapers were scattered about. He waved Jericho to a high-backed wicker armchair. He was a pleasant-faced, sandy-haired man in his forties. "What a shocking business for you! Old Sarah's head in a cardboard box? But Captain Cardwell informs me they've got their man. I'm having iced coffee. Would you care for some? Or a drink?"

"Iced coffee would be perfect," Jericho said. "Black." He waited for Thomas to come back from the kitchen with a tall cool drink. "You once told me this was 'your community'," he said. "Can you guess why Dave Morris—after he had killed Sarah Watson, if he

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did—would cut off her head, put it in a box, and carry it to my front door?"

" 'If he did'? Is there any doubt that he did?"

"Morris won't talk to me in his jail cell. He's afraid the place is bugged. And it is. Which means he won't tell me what he knows where the police can overhear him."

"But if he didn't kill Sarah, and he knows something—?"

"Tell me about Sarah and her bank account, and her will," Jericho said.

Fred Thomas shook his head, like a man who didn't believe. "Do you realize, Jericho," he asked, "that Sarah Watson has been scrounging the streets and alleys of this part of town since long before either of us was born? I can remember her as a kid. We were all a little scared of her, I suppose because she was 'different'. I thought of her as an old woman when I was five years old. That's too damned many years ago. But she was alive and apparently going strong only yesterday. I said hello to her on the street."

"About her bank account," Jericho said.

"That was last Tuesday," Thomas said. "Would you believe that beyond a good morning here and there I'd never had any conversation with her. Oh, as a kid I used to shout insults at her when I'd see her fumbling around in someone's garbage. That's all. Now she asked to see me. I think my secretary would have turned her away—rags, paper bags, not smelling like a bed of violets. I happened to come out of my office, saw her, and invited her in.

" 'You wanted to see me, Miss Watson,' I said. 'Is it Miss or Mrs.?' 'The way it is today it's Ms.,' she said. 'I want to open an account in your bank, Freddie Thomas, even though you threw a rock at me the other day.'

" 'Forty years ago, Ms. Watson,' I said.

" 'A Watson never forgets,' she said. 'I thought of a savings account.'

" 'No problem,' I said. 'How much do you want to start with, Ms. Watson?'

"So help me, then she began to pull some packages wrapped in brown paper out of her bags. Then she pulled up her skirt and rolled down her stockings. More packages. Then she began unbuttoning her blouse, or shirt waist, or whatever you call it. I wondered if I ought to call for help! More packages. I'd expected a deposit of fifty, maybe a hundred dollars. You know how much it was from Cardwell—over sixty thousand! I suggested that she consider buying

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some government bonds, renting a safety-deposit box, and keeping the bonds in the bank. So she put ten thousand in a savings account, bought bonds with the balance, and rented a box. She shoved a few hundred dollars—loose change I suppose you'd call it—back in one of her paper bags.

" 'You carry this kind of money around with you in—in those bags?'

" 'Where else?' she said. 'All my life. But recently some creep has been trying to con me out of my money and I decided I better put it somewhere safe.'

" 'Con you? What kind of con?' I asked her.

" 'Fifty Gs would buy me an option on an Atlantic City hotel, which, when it was turned into a gambling casino, would return ten times my investment. I know something about gambling. Been a gambler all my life. But I just don't trust this creep. Never have trusted his kind. I decided if I didn't hand over the money he might try to take it away from me by force. I'm getting a little old to defend myself against a grown man.' That's when the will business came up. With the help of the bank's attorney she made out a will naming this Dave Morris."

"So, obviously, Dave Morris isn't the man who was trying to con her," Jericho said.

"But if she told Morris he was her heir—" Thomas shrugged.

"Nothing else about the con man? What do you suppose she meant by 'his kind'?"

"A con artist—someone trying to sell her the Brooklyn Bridge," Thomas said.

"So she tells Dave Morris, a down-and-out bum, that he's going to inherit over sixty thousand dollars," Jericho said. "In order to get it quick, he kills her. Then he cuts off her head, puts it in a box, carries the box with his fingerprints all over it to my front door. I'm a stranger to him. Why?"

"It's beyond me," Thomas said.

"I'm a stranger, but he knows my reputation," Jericho said. "Suppose Sarah Watson told him about the con man, told Morris who the con man is? He thinks the con man killed her trying to take the money she no longer had on her person. Morris brings me the severed head, hoping I'll dig out the truth."

"A big-time con man," Thomas said. "He knew how much cash she carried around with her. He was after fifty grand, not just the few bucks most people imagined she might have as the proceeds

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from her two-dollar horse bets."

"And that con man isn't Dave Morris," Jericho said. "She left him her money. Someone who knew her habits, someone who could make a realistic guess about the money she'd gotten her hands on over all the years."

"A confidant?" Thomas suggested.

"Or a spy," Jericho said.

Captain Tom Cardwell didn't seem surprised to see Jericho outside his front door when he opened it.

"They told me at the precinct you'd gone home," Jericho said.

"Sunday's supposed to be my day off," Cardwell said. "With the Watson case wrapped up I came home. Come in."

The living room was a hodge-podge of old but comfortable-looking furniture. Things looked clean but in disorder. Cardwell seemed to read Jericho's thoughts.

"Living without a woman, things pile up," he said. "My wife died seven years ago. We bought this old house back in the days when you could buy property on a policeman's wages. When I retire next month I'm going to convert the three top floors into apartments and rent 'em out. Have to, to keep things going in today's economy." He waved to a chair. "Sit down, Mr. Jericho. Coffee?"

Jericho sat, accepting the offer of coffee. "Any luck finding the body?" he asked.

"Not yet," Cardwell said. "My men have searched every vacant building in the area. I've got the harbor police looking for it in the river. It could have been taken there and dumped." He came back from a sideboard with a mug of coffee he'd poured from an electric percolator. He handed the mug to Jericho.

"It occurred to me there's one place your men might not look," Jericho said, his face suddenly rock-hard.

"Oh? Where?" Cardwell asked.

"Here, in this house," Jericho said.

Cardwell's slate-gray eyes seemed to freeze, the coffee mug raised halfway to his mouth. "What the hell are you talking about?" His voice had a harsh, rasping sound.

"It would never occur to cops to look in the private home of their precinct captain."

"Well, I should hope not," Cardwell said, trying to smile.

"I suggest you were sure they wouldn't," Jericho said.

"I think you must be off your rocker," Cardwell said.

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"Dave Morris knew," Jericho said. "How was it? She had an appointment here to close your mythical deal for an Atlantic City hotel. Dave, having been told she'd already put the money in the bank, came with her to make sure all went well when she told you it was no deal. He waited for her outside. She didn't come out. He waited for you to go somewhere and then got into the house. Where? In the basement? He found her, head chopped off."

"That's wild!" Cardwell said.

"To Dave Morris cops are the privileged enemy. He figured if he told the cops he'd found a body in your house they'd cover it up and nail him somehow. That's why he wouldn't talk to me in that bugged cell in the precinct house. He took the head, put it in a box he probably found in your basement. I checked, you buy liquor by the case, Captain. Morris brought the box to me, the only person he could think of who might help him. He didn't dare face me because he thought I might come to you and you'd still have a chance to cover up."

"Why would I do such a thing?" Cardwell asked. He sounded hollow.

"You've worked this precinct your whole career," Jericho said. "You had quite proper reasons for watching the activities of an old bag lady like Sarah Watson. In time you realized that she was really raking in money with her racing bets. You kept it to yourself at first, because once you were a decent, honest man. If anyone knew what she was carrying around she'd be a constant target for muggers. But now, with retirement at hand, with your tastes calling for more money than your pension would supply, you tried a con game on her. Invest in an Atlantic City casino and her money would multiply by ten. She almost bought it, but maybe you were too persuasive, maybe your smile was too sincere. So she put her money in the bank and came to tell you 'no deal.' All your dreams shattered by this crazy old woman. You killed her. God knows why you cut off her head. It must have been quite a shock when you came home after your tour of duty and found her head gone."

"Her blood is all over Morris," Cardwell said.

"Sure it is. He handled the bloody head while drunk, clumsy, scared out of his wits. Shall we go down in the cellar, Captain, and have a look at the body?" Jericho stood up.

"You crazy fool, you're driving me to do this, you know," Cardwell said. There was a police special in his hand, aimed straight at Jericho. "You're right, of course. She burned me up, refusing the deal,

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calling me names. I put the slug on her. I hit her, knocked her flat. She got up, and from inside her bag she produced a knife. It was a butcher's knife, a foot and a half long, sharp as a razor. She came at me. Eighty years old! She started at me with that knife and I grabbed it away from her. She was on me, clawing at me, and I took a swing at her with the knife." He choked. "It was like cutting a flower off its stem with a sickle."

"So let's go down in the cellar and find what's left of her," Jericho said.

"I'm afraid you're not going anywhere, Mr. Jericho."

The mug of coffee flew straight into Cardwell's face. Then Jericho's smashing blow to Cardwell's jaw sent the policeman down, where he lay twitching like a broken mechanical toy.

Jericho went to the phone and dialed a number. He asked for Lieutenant Kreevich, his friend at Homicide.

"Mark? Jericho here. Look, friend, I've either solved a murder or I'm a candidate for a long stay in one of your better jails." He gave him Cardwell's address. "Bring a shovel, Mark. We may need to do some digging. And issue an order for Dave Morris' release."

"Anything else?" Kreevich asked, in a wry voice.

"Call Marla at my place, if you will, and tell her I'll be along when you're through with me."

He put down the phone. Cardwell made an effort to sit up. Jericho put his foot on the policeman's chest and held him down.

"To quote you, chum," Jericho said. "I'm afraid you're not going anywhere. Not anywhere."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

10 ***NEW*** stories — including

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a *NEW* crime story by

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BEARS WATCHING

by JOHN C. BOLAND

The market was having a rough afternoon. You can tell by the mutter of the ticker: on a good day, as the trades come over, it purrs. On a bad one, the machine coughs out the figures in staccato burps, as if all of corporate America has indigestion.

Today was one of those. The news from business and government bunkers was basically upbeat, but we were getting a selling squall. Not easy to explain. When I got back from lunch, the industrial average was off six points. The slump wasn't serious, not yet. If you listened closely, you could still hear the money-managing institutions, where the big bucks live, putting their feet down heavily as they prowled for bargains. If they started dumping stocks, the market would fall like a bucket of bricks.

National Aluminum 30,000 at 25½. Moved by Magee & Temple.

The tape sputtered on.

National Aluminum 15,000 at 25 ⅜. Moved by Magee & Temple.

That was us, good old Magee & Temple, spreading the junk around. I had trouble figuring how we were making National Aluminum out to be a bargain; it was losing a million a week from decrepit plants, was in hock up to the founder's diamond stickpin, and was loaded with pension claims that it couldn't pay.

Skirting the boardroom, where the public gathers to watch its

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capital grow, I spotted the linebacker-sized bulk of Thornton Trimble, making his traditional midday appearance. Just in case someone had snuck in the door with doubts about whether Magee & Temple was still bullish on the U.S. of A., our chairman posed in an elegant, Savile Row-tailored slouch in front of the lighted quote board, watching the trades negligently, as if the market's wanderings held no mystery. I admired his composure, but then a good stockbroker could have assured passengers on the *Titanic* that the bottom was near. In fact, one probably did.

Trimble offered some witty aside to an elderly gent, who was so flattered by the attention that he did everything but slap his knee. Before taking the top job at the firm, Trimble had been a senator and ambassador, and his connections brought in the carriage trade.

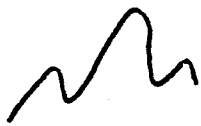
"When Trimble's crying that the world's about to end, I'll figure it's time to buy stocks." Quietly, Benjy Livermore, our chief chart-watcher, had crept up behind me. His steel-wool hair and small gloomy face gave him the look of a physicist who had discovered the universe was no longer expanding.

I said, "You think it's got far to go?"

I meant far down.

He shrugged glumly. Magee & Temple follows an unofficial policy of viewing every decline as a temporary setback. Benjy, who also wrote the firm's weekly market letter to its clients, was a master at wedging his pessimism between the lines.

"Look at Trimble," he said, "not even a little green around the gills. Besides, the charts look like the devil. Got a murderous head and shoulders top shaping up with nothing below the right shoulder but white space." His index finger sketched a



in the air, showing the chart pattern the major industrial average had formed. What he meant was, the stocks looked like they wanted to go back down the way they had come up.

"Well, when the average gets down to six hundred, the great upward tide of commerce and prosperity can resume," he said bitterly. "What's a three-hundred-point interruption?"

Benjy stalked off, and I went upstairs to my own cubicle, where without benefit of charts or Tarot cards I keep track of the airline

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and paper industries. Both were doing fine at making money, but if the stock market was soft I supposed both were getting their share of selling. That's one reason why chartists like Benjy scorn us company-watchers. By the time something shows up in a business's profits, the stock has often done its thing.

I was still there at 6:30, waiting for a source on the Coast to call me back. Benjy stuck his boyish, fifty-year-old face around the door. "So tell me, O Oz, if Seattle Aviation is winging its way to record profits, why did the stock take a dive?"

I called Seattle Avy up on my quotation machine. It had closed the day at $39 a share, four bucks and pennies cheaper than the day before.

"Looks like the sheep are panicking, selling the good along with the bad," I said.

Benjy leaned against the wall, offering me a scholarly stare through thick lenses.

"You've got a better idea?" I prodded.

He shrugged. "You know, the market was a lot easier to understand sixty years ago. All you had to do was call up Baruch or one of his cronies, ask what their pool was planning to do tomorrow morning, drive prices up or knock them down, and hop aboard for a free ride. Provided old Bernie liked you and told you the truth. These days—"

"These days pools are illegal. A shame."

"These days you never know what's jerking the market around. Are the Arabs buying gold? Is the President ticked off at Detroit? Or is something else going on?"

It was such a bland comment that I almost missed his tone. He was starting to leave.

"Hold it, pal."

His eyes inquired politely.

"The Arabs aren't buying gold this week, and the President loves everyone. So what's this 'something else'?"

He grinned too quickly. "Sunspots. Haven't you heard? We're getting a flurry of sunspots, so the market's acting crazy."

It wasn't a new theory, nor was it Benjy Livermore's cup of blarney.

"Try again," I urged.

He snuck a look behind him into the dark-paneled hallway, then closed the door. He put on an apologetic smile, but it was less convincing than closing the door had been.

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"We're pretty good friends, aren't we?"

It was a friendship that didn't go beyond the office, but I supposed that in Benjy's life that still qualified. "Sure," I said.

"So you won't assume right away that I've cracked up?"

"Not right away."

"In that case, I'll tell you. I think I've figured it out."

"Figured what out?"

"The market."

"Oh."

He waited. I said, "The whole thing?"

He nodded seriously. "Say eighty percent. The other twenty percent is random, the effect of the weather, famine, pestilence, war, good or bad profits, company mergers, Democrats or Republicans, federal monetary and credit policy. . . ."

Remembering my promise, I tried to make light. "I know those things don't count for *much*, but—"

"Actually, I think the riggers may be getting to some of them, too. It depends on how big this thing is." He moved nervously over to the window, a small one (airlines and paper weren't big this year) that looked down on a litter-clogged block of lower Broadway. A cemetery lay across the street rather than a skyscraper, so the window got plenty of western light. It was late enough that the honking of trucks had faded like southbound geese.

I remained where I sat, not trusting my legs. The money game has got rougher over the last few years. A couple of recessions and a go-nowhere market have closed down dozens of brokerage houses, and the ones that survive like you to sweat for your paycheck. Sometimes they sweat someone too hard. You never get comfortable seeing the crackups. "Look," I said, "maybe you've been burning too much midnight oil."

He turned a sad smile on me.

"Nobody can rig the stock market," I said patiently. "You know it and I know it. The thing has gotten too big even for the Baruchs. A day's trading on the New York Exchange is good for what?—half a billion these days? Plus you've got the Amex and a few thousand companies whose stock isn't listed. How is anybody, any cabal, going to manipulate eighty percent of *that*?"

"Give me a lever," he quoted.

"It must be some lever."

"Before you reserve me a rubber room, comrade, come on down the hall for a minute."

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His war room didn't have even a small window. The walls were papered with charts of stocks and stock averages: hourly charts, daily charts, weekly charts, all of them meticulously updated by hand by Benjy and a pretty graduate student who worked each afternoon. Following the prices up and down, across plains of static trading and between peaks of feverish speculation and valleys of despair, ran the ruler-straight lines that Benjy alone drew in denoting trends. There was a great, eight-year-long sweep upward to 1929, followed by a precipitous zag downward. Time and again, to varying extremes, the cycle had repeated. The last big push up seemed as remote in time as the building of the pyramids.

Benjy picked up a pencil and strolled to a spot on the opposite side of the room.

I reminded him: "The lever."

"It's like ringing the bell," he said cryptically. "The principle of the salivating dog, remember? Pavlov regularly rang a bell before feeding his dog. After a while the dog salivated when he rang the bell whether food followed or not. He'd conditioned it to a certain response."

"Okay," I said. "Skinner played a similar game with pigeons."

"Very apt—pigeons," Benjy said. "Skinner should've been a stockbroker. Now . . . see this?" He drew a circle around a nondescript little wiggle in the chart. It looked a bit like a plunging neckline. "And this. And here, back in February." Two more circles. The chart wiggles seemed vaguely similar. "I've found a half dozen more in the last four years. You know what happened after each?"

I knew what had happened last February. "The market went down?"

"With a thump."

I grunted. I've never been much of a chart follower. They're great road maps of where you've already been but I've yet to find one that could divine the future.

Benjy, of course, pored over them with the devotion of a scientist studying moon rocks. Maybe scientists who do that too long start seeing messages written inside them. Benjy tapped the chart. "It takes about six days on average for that formation to be completed. Within four days people start stampeding for the exits, dumping every stock they own. It takes two to six weeks for the process to run its course. And then the group that knew it was coming—and sold short at the outset—is buying securities at bargain-basement prices."

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I shook my head. Stand around listening to a paranoid for five minutes and you start looking over your shoulder. "Look, Benjy, let's say for the sake of argument that these plunging necklines show up on the charts before the market packs it in. You still haven't proved there's any cause-effect relationship."

He tucked the pencil behind his ear and leaned against his chart, arms folded. "I've done a little extracurricular research, watching the buying patterns from certain parts of Europe, listening to the scuttlebutt on what the big guns in this country are doing. It's started to come together. Maybe not as proof that would satisfy a court but as more coincidence than I can swallow."

"Maybe you've just got a low coincidence threshold," I said.

He favored me with his melancholy smile. "I've got a hunch that I'm going to find the same chart pattern as far back as the Eighteen Eighties. I've been working on it at home. The thing must have developed naturally—over the years people who play the market subconsciously absorbed the fact that stocks fall after a plunging neckline appears. It's like ringing the bell—or pushing their panic button: they sell. Somebody's caught on and started ringing the bell on purpose."

"So who're the Pavlovs?"

"I'm not sure, but they're big."

I stared over his shoulder, at one of the plunging necklines. Could the entire market be manipulated even for six days?—even by immensely wealthy speculators who picked their time carefully, to catch the market when volume was light, when their activities would have the greatest impact?

More important, would anyone with that kind of power care about goosing the stock market?

Benjy locked his office and followed me back to mine. I said the heck with the phone call from the Coast. When a friend, even an office friend, has built a fantasy world three doors down the hall from you, it's hard not to think you should have noticed and hauled him back to reality.

I said, "Why don't you come have dinner with Sally and me? She'd love it, hasn't seen you for too long." If she ever had. I couldn't remember.

Benjy Livermore gave a brusque shake of the head. "Some loose ends need wrapping up. Once I get this documented, someone's got to be told."

I swallowed in silence.

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"The Securities and Exchange Commission, I guess. And the brass here. I've got a lot of work to do."

"Look," I began, then shut up, realizing I'd been about to ask him not to mention my name. "Let's talk again," I said insincerely.

He gave me his dour smile. "Sure, comrade."

For the next week I managed to duck him—which takes some doing when the other fellow hangs his hat just down the hall. It's even more of an accomplishment if you don't have to admit to yourself that that's what you're up to—just that I've got this damn report to get out, right?

He stuck his head in late Wednesday morning. "How about lunch?"

I thought about a damn report. "Sure. I'll spring."

Benjy surprised me by not having much to say as we downed chops and martinis, comfortable in the knowledge that the research department's expense watchdog never blinked at anything under $100. He had brought along an armful of paperbound chartbooks, but instead of giving me an illustrated lecture he tucked them under his chair.

"So how's it going?" I asked finally.

"Got a lot of data," he said, with the reservation of a man who's no longer sure whether the universe is expanding or not. "Actually, something you said has been giving me pause."

I congratulated myself on being an anchor to reality after all. "Glad to help."

"Help? Oh, sure. But your point about the size of the market keeps throwing me. How *could* they do it—even for a few days?"

Benjy stopped by my office, dumping his charts on a chair. "But the trading patterns say they are! I've been doing more checking on orders from Zurich and Milan—and Palm Springs and East Hampton. There's some smart money in on this. I just can't nail down *how* it's done." He stared morosely at his necktie, hauled out a plaid handkerchief to spread around a gravy stain. "I hate to buck just a *theory* upstairs."

"Maybe you should put it on a back burner for a few weeks," I suggested. "Let your subconscious work on it."

Keep your job.

"I don't entirely trust my subconscious any more," he said.

That afternoon my old friend Seattle Aviation, favorite of pension-

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fund managers and bluebloods, shed another three bucks. That brought it down to $32 a share, a long way south of the point at which I'd been pushing it to our best customers. Benjy had wandered out leaving his chartbooks piled in a chair. I fumbled through them until I found the one that carried Seattle Avy and sat down with my back to the window to see what the zigs and zags looked like.

To me they looked like nothing at all. When the price had been climbing last fall, the chart notches had been rising. When the stock had started taking bumps down, the lines had duly reflected the process. *Reflected*, not *projected*. I threw the thing aside, then wondered if my fleeting impression had been right and went scrambling after the volume, feeling like a sap even as I thumbed through the pages for Seattle Avy.

I squinted at the ripples and wiggles, blurring my vision deliberately to try to see *trends* rather than incidents.

There it was.

It all but leaped off the page at me, the five days late last month when Seattle Avy had traced out a perfect plunging neckline. That action had been followed by a slight recovery leading into the past two weeks' dismal collapse.

I checked the figures at the bottom of the page, which told how many shares of the stock had changed hands each day. The total ranged from just under 100,000 to just over 250,000. The price at the time was about $50, which meant that each day's trading on those five key dates had been worth something between five million and twelve and a half million. A big bundle, to be sure, but peanuts for some folks. Especially when you realized that only a fraction of that cost would be *theirs*, just enough selling or buying at critical moments to get the herd to follow them. And the up-front money would be risk-free, practically speaking, if they *knew* the stock was going into a tailspin within a week or so. By that time the bears would have sold short hundreds of thousands of shares.

I went back to my seat by the window and looked down on the swarming afternoon crowds that emerged onto Broadway from the warren of narrow, oddly named streets where so many of the world's great fortunes had been built. For the first time in my life I wondered if the game was rigged—that is, beyond the obvious rigging that puts fellows from the best families and best schools a rung up at the start and keeps them there, unless they're hopeless jerks, until the last bell. That I could live with, just as I lived with an Italian surname, just as Benjy lived with one even more onerous, just as

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my wife Sally had decided she stood a better chance of raising half-bright kids than of climbing above associate in one of the big male-dominated investment bankers. Even with those rules, you could enjoy the game and take home a lot of chips. But if it wasn't even the game you thought, the chips were probably phony, too.

I flipped through Benjy's chartbook, amused that he had been so preoccupied with the forest—the awesomely big market—that he hadn't looked at the individual trees.

A half-dozen very popular stocks, that's all it would take if his theory held water, and once the bears had rung the bell on those, the dogs—or pigeons—would start salivating all over the place, on every stock, and the market would do what the bears wanted. A neat little plunging neckline would show up, courtesy of the stampeding suckers, and then fear would feed on itself and look out below!

In three hours of plodding through the books I found they'd played the game last month with more than a dozen of the country's most widely held stocks. There were probably others that I missed.

I sat there feeling a little like a man about to sign up for the madhouse debate team. Pro or con, please: the earth's secret rulers from Atlantis have been displaced by flying-saucer pilots.

Ninety minutes after the market closed, I hauled the stack of books down to Benjy's office. The brown-haired graduate student was alone. "Oh, Mr. Livermore had an appointment upstairs. With Mr. Trimble, I think?" She put a little question on the end, as if it seemed unlikely.

I groaned. If Trimble didn't fire him on the spot, the most Benjy could hope for was a pat on the back.

Used discreetly, I thought, his discovery could be worth a lot more than that.

The graduate student looked up again from her posting and frowned to find me still present. "He just left a minute ago. You might catch him at the elevator."

I took the hint. But it was that time of day when most of the elevators were going down, emptying the lower floors of office workers. I counted off several minutes before backtracking to the stairs and puffing my way up two flights.

The twelfth floor was all executive offices, with Trimble's suite at the south end of the building.

Only a sudden grunt and squeal kept me from walking in on top of it.

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The sounds were strangely humiliated and almost prepared me for what I saw when I peeked around the corner.

They were sprawled on the deep blue pile rug at the deserted secretaries' station outside Trimble's cave. That is, Benjy was sprawled—flat on his back, struggling under the overpowering weight of Thornton Trimble, who sat elegant as ever on his chest. Behind Trimble stood James Magee, the firm's ancient senior partner.

"Put a handkerchief in his mouth!" Magee bawled. "*His* handkerchief dammit! Now let's get him up. We can use Donaldson's office. He's still in St. Moritz."

A forelock of white hair dangling, Trimble climbed to his feet. He grabbed Benjy's wrists, jerked him up like a child, and wrestled him through a mahogany door. I heard a couple of bumps of knees against furniture, then a short squeal as if the handkerchief had been yanked free, then nothing else.

After a while Trimble and Magee came out, patting lapels, straightening neckties, and went into Magee's office. "I need a drink," the old man wheezed.

They had left Donaldson's door ajar. I crept close enough to see that one of the old-fashioned, oak-paned windows stood open. I couldn't hear anything, being twelve stories up, but people said that Benjy created quite a commotion when he hit Broadway.

Arms flailing, I supposed, crying out his secret.

I backed all the way down the hall to the stairway.

The grapevine was peddling the inside dope the next morning. Livermore had cracked up, delivered a rambling, incoherent market theory to Trimble which cost him his job. Then he'd gone completely off the rails—and out the window.

I called up my brother-in-law and used his account with another broker to sell short everything I could.

The market dropped eight points today. But I passed Thornton Trimble in the boardroom and he was smiling confidently against adversity, just as if the market's ups and downs held no mystery for him. He plays his part with conviction.

"Q"

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a CALDER and BEHRENS novelet by

MICHAEL GILBERT

It is so long since we have heard from Mr. Calder, his dog Rasselas, and Mr. Behrens that we would have been justified in thinking they had all retired from British Intelligence. Thank the Lord they haven't—they are still carrying on their espionage and counterespionage assignments, and this time it might be called Operation M—to discover how Route M works, where it starts and ends, what stations are en route. The problem was becoming Priority One in the "game without rules" . . . A modern spy story—with danger, suspense, 'tec technology, and a final burst of action . . .

THE M ROUTE

by MICHAEL GILBERT

Mr. Calder sat behind the wheel of his old Ford Zodiac and stared out at the sodden world. It was four o'clock on a February afternoon and visibility was down to a hundred yards. It would decrease still further as afternoon fell away into evening.

Ahead of him a length of white road crawled up toward the skyline, running with water in all its ruts. To left and right stretched unfenced moorland. The rain covered everything in a slowly moving pall.

A high-pitched whistling noise made him look down.

Headphones hung over the back of the passenger seat, the cushion of which had been taken out. In the open space where the seat should have been was a black ebonite-fronted box. It had two tuning knobs and a single large dial graduated in degrees, on which a needle was rotating slowly.

© *1963 by Michael Gilbert; originally titled "Cross-Over."*

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The whistling stopped. The needle on the dial steadied and the voice of Mr. Behrens, distorted but clearly recognizable, spoke from the headset.

"Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. Back to eighteen. Steady on eighteen. Over to you."

Mr. Calder put his thumb on the "speak" switch of the microphone and said, "Two hundred and thirteen. I shall have to re-plot. Out for a moment."

The map on his knees was mounted on plywood and covered with isinglass. He took a protractor from the pocket of the car, aligned it carefully on the isinglass, and marked four points. Then he picked up a graduated ruler and joined the points so that they formed two intersecting lines. He peered down at the map. It was now so dark that he needed a flashlight, and it took a minute to get it out of the car locker and focus it.

Then he picked up the microphone and said, "He's on the Nettlefold byroad, going north."

The ghostly voice of Mr. Behrens answered, "I agree. We'd better get moving. We'll take another cross-bearing ten minutes from now. If we keep on as we are, one of us ought to cut him off before he gets to Felshead. Out."

Mr. Calder started up the engine, engaged gear, and splashed off up the road, his windshield wipers working busily.

It was nearly two hours later, and quite dark, when he turned out of the minor road which he had been following, into a rather larger road. Ahead of him his lights picked out a signpost. "This looks like it," he said to himself. "And about time too."

The Bailiffs Arms was a dark crooked building, originally a posting-house, now a small residential hotel. Mr. Calder steered his car into the yard. There were two other cars parked there already. One was a Morris station wagon and belonged, he knew, to his friend, Mr. Behrens. The other was an old but solid-looking Mercedes.

Mr. Calder parked his own car, locked all the doors carefully, and made his way through the back door of the hotel into the smoking room. A bright fire was blazing in the hearth. On one side of it Mr. Behrens was seated. On the other chair he recognized, with some surprise, the angular figure of Mr. Fortescue, who combined the offices of manager of the Westminster branch of the London and Home Counties Bank and of head of the Joint Services Standing Intelligence Committee.

Mr. Fortescue, who made few sartorial concessions, was dressed

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in the same black coat and striped trousers that he would have worn in his banker's office.

"I didn't know, sir, that it was you who was playing hare to our hounds," said Mr. Calder.

"It's the first time we've given the apparatus a field trial," said Mr. Fortescue. "I thought I might as well do it myself. Since you both arrived here within five minutes of me, I gather it was effective."

He put his hand into the side pocket of his coat, pulled out what seemed to be an ordinary cigarette lighter, and placed it on the table.

"Extremely effective," said Mr. Behrens. "How does it work?"

"It's a transmitting set which sends out a single VHF note. It's battery-powered, and will transmit for two hundred hours. It's tuned in to the receiving sets in your cars, which incorporate a direction finder. The whole thing's a development of the device which the Germans used for locating transmitting sets in Occupied France—only it's much more accurate and works over a much longer range."

"What sort of fix does it give you?"

"The makers say one mile at a hundred miles. That's under laboratory conditions. But you can't rely on that in practice."

"I'll say you can't," said Mr. Calder. "Every time your car passed under a power line, the beam jumped about like a performing flea. And another thing. You were doubling about—changing direction—going back on your tracks. If we were really after someone, and he didn't know we were there, presumably he'd get on to some route nationale, or autobahn, and go down it damned fast. Every time we stopped to plot his position, he'd get ten miles farther away from us."

"There's quite a simple solution to that," said Mr. Fortescue. "You must be given very fast cars. Anything else?"

"Can't they fit a cut-out to eliminate interference from power lines?"

"They're working on it now. It's the one big snag in the apparatus. But it's a difficult technical problem."

"Well, here's an easy one," said Mr. Calder. "I want a map-board with an electric light built into it, so that I don't have to waste time messing about with a flashlight every time I plot."

"A good idea," said Mr. Fortescue. "What about you, Behrens?"

"I didn't experience any real snags," said Mr. Behrens. "We were helped by the fact that we were operating on a stretch of moor with

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very few roads. So, however roughly we plotted, there was never any real doubt where you were and in which direction you were going. If there were a lot of little roads, it might be trickier. But I think it's a perfectly sound method of following a car without having to get within miles of it."

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue. "I think the experiment can be said to have been successful."

"Was it just an experiment?" said Mr. Calder. "Or had you something practical in mind. Something you intended to use us on."

Mr. Fortescue said, "I've got something very practical in mind. We're going to use this device to uncover Route M."

For a long moment nobody spoke, and the only sound was the battering of the rain against the windows. Then Mr. Behrens said, "That's a very interesting idea. Which of us is going to be the hare on *that* run?"

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Fortescue, with a smile, "that you're both too well known to our friends on the other side to make convincing hares. You'll be acting as hounds, just as you did today. The hare's going to be Nichol. Does either of you know him?"

"David Nichol. Early thirties."

"That's right."

"I taught him German—that would have been just after the war. He must have been about fifteen. He was a good linguist, even then."

"He started learning European languages when he was eight. He speaks half a dozen, and is completely fluent in German and Russian."

"Unusual application for a boy of eight," said Mr. Calder.

"He was an unusual boy," said Mr. Fortescue. "With an unusual background. His father, John Nichol, was an ardent Communist. He was one of the first to join the anti-Franco forces in the field. He was very lucky. He survived for nearly a year."

"With that background," said Mr. Calder, "David should be a thoroughgoing Communist himself."

"And so he might have been. But some very odd stories got back to his mother, about the circumstances of his father's death. Very odd, indeed. According to his comrades, some of whom ultimately got back to England from internment, or prison camp, John Nichol wasn't an ordinary battle casualty. There was a mystery about his death. One story, which was widely believed, was that he had been betrayed to a Franco patrol by the orders of the commissar of his battalion. The Russians were becoming alarmed by his growing

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influence in the group, and came to the conclusion that he ought to be liquidated before he became canonized."

"There's a ring of probability about that," agreed Mr. Calder.

"It was probable enough to convince his mother. She decided to dedicate David—then aged eight, mind you—to the anti-Communist front. She was a woman of considerable imagination, and great persistence. She had her son trained in such a way that he was bound to go into Intelligence, which he did. Of course, we realized as soon as we set eyes on him that we'd got a man in a million. Single-minded, dedicated, with all the basic skills already learned. The difficulty was to know how to use him best."

Mr. Fortescue stopped to tap out his pipe, and said, "In the end we sold him to the Russians."

"With a return ticket, I presume."

"We hoped so. We sent him to Korea, and arranged for him to be captured. He was an exceptionally intelligent and docile prisoner. They sent him to the Hwei Pé Camp School where he was thoroughly indoctrinated. When Soviet Intelligence were completely happy about him, they arranged for him to be returned to this country on exchange."

"Nice," said Mr. Behrens.

"He's been invaluable," agreed Mr. Fortescue. "But he can't keep it up forever. That's why we're going to use him to uncover Route M. A final fling."

"It seems almost a waste," said Mr. Calder. "I don't mean that as a criticism," he added hastily. "You'd be able to judge best. But a well-placed double agent—"

"Discovering how Route M works—where it starts—what the stations are en route—is becoming more important than anything else in our program. In the last ten years they've taken a constant stream of people out by it. Their agents, our agents, scientists, diplomats, all sorts. It's got to be shut down."

"If we shut it down, won't they simply open another route?"

"Oh, certainly. But it'll take time. It's the next six months that are important."

"Who do we think we're going to lose in the next six months?" said Mr. Calder. "Or is that an indiscreet question?"

"Extremely indiscreet," said Mr. Fortescue. "But I think I'd better tell you."

And he did.

When he had finished, Mr. Calder said, "If that's even in the cards,

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sir, I agree, of course. It's worth three of Nichol to put the ROAD CLOSED signs up. How soon will things start moving?"

"The first steps have been taken. Nichol has let his Russian masters know that he is under suspicion. He has asked for asylum, in the USSR, and they've promised to get him out. If we suspect him, it follows we won't allow him out of England by any normal route. He'd be stopped at the port or the airfield. Therefore he's got to go unofficially. And that means Route M. As soon as he gets his marching orders he'll tip us off, and we'll let you know. After that I can give you very few instructions. You'll have to deal with each situation as it arises. If you can locate the route without the other side realizing what you're doing, so much the better. If you have to get rough and close it permanently it can't be helped."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Calder thoughtfully, "that there's one point where things are bound to get a mite complicated. And that's when we come to the actual cross-over. A lot's going to depend on Nichol, then."

"I recall him quite clearly now," said Mr. Behrens. "A shock of thick black hair. A white, rather serious face. Very solemn and self-contained. A person who had elevated self-control to a moral principle."

"He has never touched alcohol in his life," said Mr. Fortescue, "and has never had other than a brotherly regard for a woman. Although," he added, "to judge from modern trends in fiction, even that is not an entirely safe simile these days."

"He sounds a bit of a prig," said Mr. Calder.

"Not a prig," said Mr. Behrens. "A puritan."

On a day in late April, David Nichol walked along the west bank of Hamble River and out onto the jetty. Ahead of him stretched the estuary, flat and placid. He looked very different from the smart young man in conventional clothes who had caught the train from Waterloo.

His journey had taken him to a room in a small hotel in a back street in Southampton, where he had stripped to the skin and put on the seaman's rig carefully laid out for him on the bed: corduroy trousers, rubber-soled shoes, and thick gray stockings into which the trouser ends were tucked; a string vest, a collarless shirt, a thick, blue, roll-necked jersey, and a duffle coat.

Most of his own clothes went into pockets or were squeezed into the top of an already bulging kit bag. Twenty minutes after entering

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the hotel he had left it by the back door. From beginning to end he had spoken no word to anyone in the hotel.

His next stop was at a small bicycle shop. Here also he was expected. The owner of the shop—a long man with a squint—had a bicycle ready for him, and helped him to lash the kit bag onto the carrier. He also was a man of few words.

Nichol had stopped at a pull-in for motorists at Botley, and had eaten a meal of eggs and chips, with two mugs of teak-colored tea and several wedges of bread and butter, after which he had pedaled slowly on his way.

Just short of the jetty which he was making for stood a bungalow with a derelict strip of garden in front, and an overgrown lawn running down to the river behind. After examining the name on the gate, Nichol had wheeled his bicycle boldly into the garden, propped it against the wall, unstrapped the kit bag, shouldered it, and walked away up the path to the gate. As he did so he saw, out of the corner of his eye, a curtain in one of the front windows of the bungalow twitch apart and close again.

At the far end of the jetty a thickset man with a beard was sitting on one of the iron mooring-bollards smoking a pipe and watching gulls fighting for galley scraps. He turned his head as Nichol approached.

"Nichol?"

"That's right, sir."

"You made good time. No hitches?"

"Smooth as clockwork."

"We shall be sailing in an hour. Can you handle a dinghy?"

"I've done most of my rowing at Windsor," said Nichol, "but as long as it's calm I shall make out all right."

"I could easily row you myself," said the man. "But it might look a bit odd if the owner took the sculls and the latest-joined member of the crew sat in the stern. I don't think we're being watched. But I don't believe in taking any chances."

"I'll manage," said Nichol.

In fact, he rowed very competently, and they were soon tying up under the stem of the ten-ton Hillyard Bermuda fore-and-aft-rigged sloop which was swinging in the tideway.

"You get below and lie down," said the owner. "I've declared a crew of two. One's ashore now. The other's below. They're both dressed exactly like you. All we've got to be careful not to do is to let the three of you appear on deck at the same time."

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Nichol nodded, and disappeared down the orlop ladder. The owner cast a slow glance up the Middle Reach of Hamble River. No one appeared to be the least interested in him or his boat. He extracted a cigar from a case in his breast pocket, and lit it.

Almost exactly 14 hours later he said, "Slow ahead. Dead slow. Cut the engine."

It was an hour before daylight, and the sloop lay a quarter of a mile southwest of the Nez de Jobourg, rising and falling on a gentle swell. A thick white blanket of early morning mist lay over the water.

"Couldn't have had better weather if we'd booked it in advance," said the owner. He had been up all night; his eyes were red-rimmed and his voice was hoarse, but he sounded happy.

"Looks all right to me," said Nichol. "What next?"

"Bertrand will row you ashore in the dinghy. I'm not sure, to within a mile, exactly where you are. But it's not important. All you have to do is to scramble up the cliff—there are half a dozen paths—and you'll find yourself on quite a good road. It runs parallel to the top of the cliff, about half a mile inland. It's got kilometers stones marked Auderville on one side and Beaumont-Hague on the other. You want the stone which shows Auderville-four and Beaumont-six. That's where the car will be waiting. Clear?"

"Quite clear," said Nichol. "As I don't even know your name, I'm afraid I can't write you a bread-and-butter letter—but thanks for a lovely trip."

"Don't mention it," said the bearded man. "Your kit bag is already in the boat, I see. Goodbye."

An hour later the sun was rising, red and glorious, out of the mist. The cutter had rounded the Nez de Jobourg and was out of sight, and Nichol was walking along the grass verge of the road, counting the little white hundred-meter stones—seven, eight, nine. The next kilometer stone must be in the dip ahead. No sign of a car.

Nichol perched on the stone and lowered his kit bag to the ground. It was a quarter to seven. Soon farm traffic would be passing. He would have to make a plan.

Someone came through a gap in the hedge and walked slowly toward him. It was a girl.

His first impressions were of size and color. She was big and blonde. As she came closer, he took in other details. She had a peasant's nose with no bridge to it, eyes which were pulled frac-

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tionally upward at the outer corners, and a generous mouth. She was wearing trousers which looked like jodhpurs but were more generously cut, a polo-necked sweater, and a windbreaker. She had a businesslike look about her, Nichol thought. The sort of girl who could ride a horse, drive a car, or plow a field.

She said, "Mr. Nichol? Put out your right hand. Press the tip of your index finger onto this black stuff. It'll wash off, I assure you. Now onto this pad. Fine."

She had taken out a small card which she compared carefully with the fingerprint which Nichol had made on her pad. Then she said, "The car is in a field, two hundred meters down the road. Give me your bag."

"It's a bit heavy," said Nichol. "I'd better take it—"

Before he could say any more she had swung the kit bag onto her shoulder and was walking off down the road.

The car, a dark green Citroën convertible tourer, had been skillfully tucked away in a dip among bushes.

"It is time you ceased to be a sailor," said the girl. She spoke in the clear unaccented English of a foreigner who has been very carefully coached in a language, but mostly out of books. "Your traveling clothes are in the kit bag. You had better take off everything you are wearing. Even the underclothes are English."

"All right," said Nichol. The new clothes fitted him well. Gray worsted sports trousers, a heavy silk shirt with open neck, and a silk scarf; a gray sports jacket, tighter at the waist than an English tailor would have cut it, and with padded shoulders.

As he took his old clothes off, the girl rolled them up and stowed them in the empty kit bag. Since the girl herself seemed to regard the operation as a matter of routine, Nichol tried to convey the impression that, so far as he was concerned, there was nothing out of the ordinary in stripping to the skin in front of a girl.

When he was dressed, she said, almost as though the operation they had just concluded had effected an introduction between them, "My name, by the way, is Shura."

"I had better know your second name, too."

She looked surprised. "The same as yours, of course," she said. "Shura Nichol. We are man and wife. That is how our papers are made out."

Nichol said, "Oh, I see. Yes. I suppose that's a sensible sort of arrangement."

"We are on a camping holiday. The kit is all in the back of the

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car. There are many camp sites in France and Germany. If we went to hotels, there would be registration forms to fill in—"

"An excellent idea," said Nichol. "Do I drive the car, or do you?"

"We take it in turns. It will be a long day's run. More than three hundred miles. We had better get started."

She threw the kit bag into the bushes.

"Isn't that a bit risky?"

"In England, perhaps. In France, no. The peasant who finds it will not report it. He will think it good luck."

The tip of Nichol's fingers touched the cigarette lighter, which he had transferred to his new clothes along with his personal possessions. Luck, he said to himself, that's what I'm going to need, too. Any damned amount of it.

Eighty miles away, in a wood south of Bolbec, the sensitive needle on the dial of Mr. Calder's car began to quiver. He picked up the microphone.

"He's off, I think," he said.

"Moving southeast," agreed the voice of Mr. Behrens.

The thing David Nichol admired most in that long day's run was his companion's driving. He himself was a good driver. A part of his training had been the proper handling of cars, and a course at the Police Driving School had added technique to a natural aptitude. But he was not as good as Shura. She drove as safely as he did, and nearly five miles an hour faster.

There were other things to admire about her. Every move she made had the unconscious economy and control which are only achieved by an athlete at the height of training. Muscle was there under the flesh, but it was in the right place and was not obtrusive. A ballet dancer at the peak of her career, an Olympic runner or jumper would have carried her body and limbs in just such a fashion.

As she drove down the long straight road from Bayeux to Caen, he looked at her out of the corner of his eye and found himself wondering about her past. She was clearly a Slav; a South Russian, he thought. Perhaps a Georgian. She could not have attained her perfection in English—which was matched, as he soon noted, by a nearly equal perfection in French—without at least twelve years' training. Yet she did not look more than 24.

Could a totalitarian regime select boys and girls at twelve, as a breeder might select promising foals, and train them solely for its

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purposes? Teach them the requisite languages, train them in judo, and the use of poisons, teach them how to shoot, how to drive a car, how to operate a wireless set? There was nothing impossible about it. Sparta had selected her soldiers at the age of seven.

It would dehumanize them, of course. The only thing that Shura had not learned to do was to smile. Or could she do that too? Or make love? If the job demanded it, she could probably do that just as efficiently as she drove a car.

They had a picnic lunch in a wood south of Montargis. There was hot soup in a vacuum flask, and pâté and fruit. Shura served him first and then herself. She produced a bottle of wine and when he shook his head put it away, unopened, and substituted citronate.

"I fancy they've stopped for lunch," said Mr. Behrens. "We'll have time to work out an accurate fix on them now."

"We might have time for lunch ourselves," said Mr. Calder sourly.

All that afternoon they drove on, east and south. Sometimes they talked. Nichol knew very well that if he asked her questions about herself they would be politely blocked, and she seemed as uninterested in him as an air hostess in a passenger.

There were maps in the glove compartment, but she seemed to know the route and never asked for directions. He tried to estimate where they would be likely to spend the night. If they kept up their present speed and general direction they would be somewhere south of Dijon. She had talked about camping. He knew that France was well ahead of other countries in this respect and had numerous camps, some of them run by national motoring and cycling organizations, others by the local *syndicat d'initiative.*

They were well-organized places with numbered tent sites, running water on tap, and good sanitary arrangements. During the summer months a camp superintendent would live permanently on the site, in his own caravan.

They had crossed the Saône a few kilometers south of Beaune and were now running up the heavily wooded valley of one of its tributaries. Nichol, who was driving, glimpsed the giant pylons of the recently completed Saône-et-Loire hydroelectric project, striding up the hillside on the right of the road. It was half-past seven. There was perhaps an hour of daylight left.

"Not far now," said Shura. "The camp lies up this side road. It is a beautiful site."

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"You have been there before."

"Once or twice. We turn left here. The road leads only to the campsite. We shall see it in a moment."

The road climbed gently round the contours of the hill. They swung round the final bend, under a wooden arch which said CAMP DE LOUVATANGE, and came to rest in the graveled space which formed the car-parking lot.

Despite the earliness of the season, three or four caravans were parked round the opening, and the flysheets of more than one tent could be seen among the trees beyond.

The door of the nearest caravan opened, and a man came out. He had a gingery mustache, thin gingery hair, and a face the color of smoked salmon. He said, in very bad French, "Welcome to the camp. My name's Horton. Major Horton. I'm in charge here. If there's anything I can do for you, you must let me know."

His bulbous eyes frankly appraised the girl's face and figure, and he said with increased warmth, "Anything at all. As soon as you've settled down, come and have a drink and a chat in my caravan, and I'll put you wise to the camp routine."

Ex-public school, ex-Army, thought Nichol. Ex-Kenya, pro-segregation and anti- any sort of hard work as long as someone would pay him gin money. "It would give us great pleasure to do that," he said in formal French.

"Hullo," said the major. "Here comes another of 'em. Wonder who *he* is. Wasn't told about this one. Unusual rush of business for the time of year."

"These damned power lines are playing Old Harry with my set," said Mr. Calder. "Over."

"Not much better here," said Mr. Behrens. "I think he's crossed the river. We shall have to keep pretty close behind him if we don't want to lose him."

"Why not let him settle down for the night? Then we can fix him accurately."

"Suppose he doesn't stop?"

"Drive all night, you mean?"

"Why not?"

"If they drive all night," said Mr. Calder, "we shall have to do the same. I'll take the Besançon road, you cross the river lower down and keep on his tail. I'll be able to give you some sort of cross-bearing when I get to the top."

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Mr. Behrens said nothing. He was beginning to feel the strain. He could, if necessary, go on all night. But what he wanted at that moment, more than anything else in the world, was a hot bath and a good dinner.

He swung the car round the bend, saw too late the notice ahead of him, braked, and came to a halt in a graveled forecourt.

Three people were walking toward him. One was a girl, the second a man in a bush jacket, with a reddish mustache. The third was David Nichol.

He had time to drop the earphones onto the floor and slide the seat cushion back over the set, before the man caught up with him. He glanced at Mr. Behrens' GB plate.

"My name's Horton," he said. "Major Horton. You wouldn't be a Modern Romany, I suppose?"

"That's right," said Mr. Behrens.

Nichol and the girl were moving off toward their own car.

"Your organizing secretary was here last week. He told me I should be seeing some of you chaps soon. I must say, I take my hat off to you. Straight out from your desks and offices. You won't have had much experience of this sort of thing, I take it?"

Nichol and the girl had got into the car and were bumping off up one of the paths into the wood.

"I'm an accountant," said Mr. Behrens boldly. "I spend my life among balance sheets and profit-and-loss accounts. It was only last week that I decided I *must* revert to a simpler method of existence. I haven't got much kit with me. A ground sheet, a couple of blankets."

"You're a real Romany," said the major admiringly. "I can see that. Prepared to rough it." Mr. Behrens shuddered. "I'm an old campaigner myself. I can probably give you a few tips. Let's find a nice sheltered place for you."

The major pointed at the taillight of the green Citroën.

"Better give them a bit of elbow room," he said with a chuckle. "They look to me like a honeymoon couple. Don't want to intrude on their privacy, eh?"

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Behrens.

"Now you'll find quite a snug little berth here, under this tree. Spread the ground sheet over you and peg it down each side. What about grub?"

"I've got some cold food with me and a flask of coffee. I wasn't thinking of doing any actual cooking. Not yet."

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"We could have a twig fire going in no time," said the major. "And I've got a few old safari pots and pans I could lend you."

"Thank you, no," said Mr. Behrens. "I've had a long and tiring day, I'll just rig up my—er—bivvy." The bitter thought was of Mr. Calder, at that very moment drawing up before some snug hostelry. "I'll be quite happy with a packet of sandwiches and a hot drink."

"The great thing," said the major, "when you're sleeping on mother earth is to dig a hole for your hip."

A hundred yards away Shura had finished erecting the safari-model combined dwelling and sleeping tent and had plugged in the electric light from a spare battery in the car. It looked, Nichol thought, extremely inviting, a tiny refuge of light and shelter in a darkening world.

"Can I help?" he asked.

"It is really easier for me to do it. I know where everything is. Perhaps you could unroll the beds, while I set the table."

There were, Nichol saw, two sleeping bags, each with an inflatable mattress and pillow.

"All you have to do," said the girl, "is to blow them up. You will have to find what degree of inflation suits you best. I like mine quite soft. Just enough to keep my body off the ground. Will you have an aperitif before we eat?"

"Thank you," said Nichol. "I think I should enjoy that."

"Tournedos Rossini will do very nicely," said Mr. Calder. "Followed, I think, by a Sorbet, and a bottle of Clos des Lambrays, 1955."

Outside it had started to rain.

David Nichol heard the rain pattering on the flysheet of the tent and turned over in his sleeping bag. He was tired, but sleep seemed far away. There was something wrong with his mattress. He had inflated it too hard and was rolling and bouncing like a small boat on a choppy sea. Also he was too hot.

He threw back the down-lined coverlet and lay for a moment with his arms outside. A warm hand came out from the sleeping bag beside him. It touched his hand, then moved down to the mattress. There was a hiss of escaping air. Nichol felt himself sinking.

"Better?" asked Shura.

"Much better," he said.

Mr. Behrens was first up. He shaved under a cold tap, repacked

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his belongings, and ten minutes later was freewheeling out of the parking lot and down the hill. He felt it wiser not to disturb Major Horton. If there was indeed a fee to pay for one of the most excruciating nights he had ever spent, it could be collected, in due course, from the Modern Romanies.

In fact, he had not been unobserved. A pair of cold and protuberant eyes under projecting ginger eyebrows had watched his unobtrusive departure.

There was a telephone in Major Horton's caravan, connected to the exchange at Besançon. He asked for a number and when he was connected he spoke rapidly. His French seemed to have improved.

Mr. Behrens stopped at the first café which he found open and had breakfast and a more satisfactory wash and shave. He then drove his car into a side turning and switched on his set.

It was still only seven o'clock.

Mr. Calder answered at once.

"I hope you had a good night," said Mr. Behrens.

"Excellent," said Mr. Calder. "And you—?"

"Unspeakable."

"When you went off the air so suddenly, I assumed you'd run into our friend."

"You assumed correctly. My right hip is still paralyzed. I'll tell you all about it one day. I think he's off again."

It was a false alarm. It was after eight before the needle flickered, and started to creep across the dial.

"Due east," said Mr. Behrens.

"There are only two roads to Belfort," said Mr. Calder, who had been devoting his attention to the map. "The southern looks the natural one for them. I'll take it myself, and keep ahead. You can take the northern route through Vesoul. And keep out of trouble."

"I'll do my best," snapped Mr. Behrens. "Out."

It was at eleven o'clock, on the long climb up to Altkirch, that he ran into the roadblock. It was a single whitewashed pole resting on trestles across the road. In the split second when he spotted it as he came round the corner, he wondered if his car was heavy enough to crash it.

The German frontier was about 20 miles ahead. He braked and came to a halt.

One of the policemen advanced toward the car. The other remained seated on his chair beside the road. They were oldish men, police reservists, Mr. Behrens thought. He was uncomfortably aware

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that he had had no time to cover up the apparatus on the seat beside him.

"What's all this about?" he said.

"Routine check," said the man. But he had seen the wireless set. His eyes jerked down to the number plate on the car and Mr. Behrens saw him glance back at his companion, who got quickly off his chair.

Mr. Behrens opened the door of the car and slid out. They were on an upland plateau, with a long view of the road in both directions. There was no other car in sight.

On his left, 20 yards down the road, was a small hay barn. He could see the policemen's bicycles propped up against it.

"This apparatus—you have a license for it?"

Mr. Behrens sighed deeply.

"Of course," he said. He dipped his hand inside his coat and pulled out an automatic pistol. "If you do not do what I say, I shall be forced to shoot you both. I have already killed three men. I should not advise you to touch your own guns."

The two men backed away. There was no fight in them.

"Into that barn," he said.

The windows of the barn were mere slits, and the bar across the double doors looked stout. They would break out, but it would take them time.

He wheeled the two bicycles back to the road and threw them down the ravine on the other side. Then he drove off.

Forty minutes later he was in Germany. There was no trouble at the frontier, where he joined a stream of cars passing the checkpost. His English passport and GB plate took him through without a hitch.

As soon as he had got clear of the traffic, he switched on his set again. The earphones crackled angrily.

"Where the devil have you been?" said Mr. Calder.

"A bit of a holdup," said Mr. Behrens. "The police."

"You've been held up by the police?"

"On the contrary," said Mr. Behrens, pleased by his own wit.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'll tell you later. Where's our friend?"

"Ahead of us," said Mr. Calder. "East by northeast. I hope he stops for lunch soon."

The afternoon run was uneventful. Shura drove and Nichol kept his eyes on the map. They were turning slowly north, and he saw now that their long detour had been designed to avoid the barrier

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of Cologne, the Ruhr, and the Lower Rhine where the NATO and West German defenses were thickest.

By teatime they were running into the southern part of the Black Forest, a region of dumpy hills, thick woodland, and occasional lakes. They passed through empty holiday resorts. By August they would be packed with stout fathers in Lederhosen, white-faced Haus-fraus, and a Pied Piper's horde of flaxen-haired children.

At six o'clock they stopped at one of those lakeside villages and found a café open. They were the only customers.

"Where do you plan to spend the night?" asked Nichol.

"It is a Gast-haus in the forest, near Adelsheim. We shall have no company. It is not yet open for the season."

Now that they had left France behind, she seemed more relaxed, a little readier to talk.

"You know the proprietor then? He allows you to stay there out of season?"

"Certainly. His name is Bauer. He was a member of Goering's personal bodyguard. The Reichsmarschall was an interesting man. Did you know that he was fond of birds?"

"Yes," said Nichol cautiously. "So I had heard."

"Each of his country retreats was named after a different bird."

"A romantic idea."

"He was highly romantic," agreed Shura. "This one was the retreat of the nightingale. *Die Nachtigall*."

It took them two hours, by tortuous roads which zigzagged up hills, twisted into hidden valleys, crossed streams brown with the local iron-ore, and climbed again through pine forest cut into geometrical patterns. It was too dark to read the map and some of the roads they used would not, he felt certain, have been marked on any map at all. The last 15 minutes were spent bumping along a sandy road.

"It is a private road," said Shura.

"It feels like one," agreed Nichol.

The Gast-haus der Nachtigall was a three-story, shingle-roofed building, with a deep balcony along the second-floor frontage, and a wide door leading under the balcony into an interior courtyard. There were no lights in the windows, but Shura drove confidently into the courtyard and sounded her horn.

A door serving the kitchen quarters opened and a man came out.

"Good evening, Herr Bauer," said Shura, in German.

"Good evening, Fraulein. You have made good time."

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Horn-rimmed glasses set on a long thin nose. The hair gray, running back from the brown seamed expanse of the forehead. The mouth prim.

He said, "My boy will take your things up to your room. A fire has been lit in the Gast-zimmer. Come."

He led the way into the front room. It was paneled in pitch pine, and from the walls the creatures of the Schwartzwald looked down at them: squirrels, badgers, roebuck, blue hare, and ruffled capercaillie.

Herr Bauer had brought them, unasked, a tall bottle of white wine and a squat bottle of brandy. He filled two large glasses with wine and two small ones with brandy.

"After a journey," he said, "it is kinder to the stomach to take a small amount of fortified spirits before you drink a natural wine."

Nichol swallowed the brandy. It was aromatic. The glass of wine followed it more slowly. Herr Bauer refilled the wine glasses and said, "Dinner in half an hour," and withdrew.

Nichol said, "He doesn't look much like an S.S. man, does he?"

Shura said shortly, "I imagine that even in S.S. units there must have been administrative people—clerks and quartermasters." She seemed to be regretting her earlier confidence.

Nichol nodded. The warmth from the tiled stove was welcome. Being locked away alone with Shura in this house in the middle of a forest gave him a delusive feeling of security. Tomorrow there would be trouble. Tonight was tonight.

"The luggage will be in our room by now," she said. "I will go and change. Give me a quarter of an hour."

Nichol sipped the second glass of wine. Somewhere at the back of his consciousness a very faint alarm had sounded. He took a moment to track it down. Two days before, when they had first met, the girl had shown no embarrassment when he had stripped to the skin in front of her. Why should she mind taking off all *her* clothes in front of him. And above all, why had she said something so entirely out of character, so miss-ish, as "I'll go and change. Give me a quarter of an hour." It made no sense.

Nichol put down his wine glass, got up, and went across to the door. The place was quiet as a tomb.

He went out. There was a staircase ahead of him, leading to a landing running the length of the buildings. He guessed that the main bedrooms would face south.

There was a light under the door of one of them and after a

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moment's hesitation he turned the handle and went in.

It was their room. Shura's suitcase was on one side of the double bed, open, and her windbreaker, sweater, and trousers were lying beside it. Evidently she had changed, but very quickly.

There was a newish suitcase on the other side of the bed. Nichol opened it and found shirts and underclothes, a pair of flannel trousers, a dark blue pullover and a jacket, all new and neatly packed. He took off his shirt and tie, ran some hot water into the basin, and started to clean himself up.

Herr Bauer said, "A car has just come into the southwest driveway. It has pulled off the road."

He and Shura were in a basement room. They were watching a map of the estate on the wall, covered by glass. In the bottom left-hand corner two pinpoints of light glared red. "It could be a casual trespasser, a pair of lovers in a car. But if you are being followed—"

"I think we are being followed," said Shura. "There was a man in a dark blue Saab who came into camp after us last night. He left before we got up, and I have not seen him at all today."

"Martin is patrolling now. If there is a dark blue Saab, we should take no risks. The driver will have to be attended to."

As he spoke, the lights on the panel flicked and changed pattern.

"Possibly I was wrong," said Herr Bauer. "The car is going. Nevertheless, I think we will take all precautions tonight. If there should be trouble—I hope your passenger is a sound sleeper?"

"I will make certain," said Shura seriously, "that he sleeps very well indeed."

It was, in fact, Mr. Behrens who had driven his car into the edge of the Nachtigall domain. He had backed out again in answer to a call on the wireless from Mr. Calder, who had come to a halt half a mile farther down the road. It was the first time they had set eyes on each other since leaving England.

Mr. Behrens pulled up, walked across, and climbed into the back of Mr. Calder's car. In the darkness beside him something stirred.

He put out his hand and a cold nose was pushed into it.

"I didn't know you were bringing Rasselas with you," he said.

"He refused to be left behind." When Mr. Calder spoke, the great dog turned his head, and his amber eyes reflected the light from the dashboard.

"How are you going to get him back again?"

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"We'll think about that when the time comes," said Mr. Calder. "I want to hear about your adventures last night. Tell me more about that chap at the camp."

"He called himself Major Horton. Leathery skin, baldish, with a halo of reddish hair, thick gingery eyebrows, poached-egg eyes."

"Sounds like an unpleasant character. Do you think he rumbled you?"

"I wondered," said Mr. Behrens. "He did seem to accept me rather easily. If I really had been a Modern Romany, or whatever it was he called me, presumably I'd have had some sort of card or papers. And if he did suspect me, that would account for the trouble I had near Altkirch."

He told Mr. Calder about it.

Mr. Calder said, "We shall have to sort that out with the Department when we get back. The important point at the moment is, *were you followed?*"

"I'm quite certain I wasn't."

"Did it occur to you that they might have put a midget transmitter in your car, during the night?"

"Certainly it occurred to me," said Mr. Behrens coldly. "I spent half an hour after breakfast turning my car out. Nothing had been tampered with."

"In that case," said Mr. Calder, "I wonder why we have already aroused such interest."

"Interest?"

"Before you arrived, a man walked up to the edge of the trees over there and kept me under observation for several minutes. He has gone now."

"You saw him?"

"No. But Rasselas told me about him. Never mind. The first thing is to find somewhere to eat. I passed a nice little place in the outskirts of Ringheim."

They were finishing dinner when Mr. Calder suddenly said, "Got it."

"Got what?"

"Nachtigall—the nightingale. It was one of Goering's hideouts. He had five or six of them, all in remote areas, all top secret. When life at the center got too much for him he used to lie up in one of them. He called them his 'nests.' They were all named after birds, you see. The lark's nest, the heron's nest, the nightingale's nest."

"I wonder if he had one called the cuckoo's nest."

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"I remember being shown round one of them by an American Intelligence officer in 1945. It had a very elaborate approach warning system, operated by crossing beams of infrared light. And one or two rather nasty booby traps for the benefit of unwanted visitors."

"A highly suitable staging point for our friends."

"Just what I thought," said Mr. Calder. "A bit later on I'll go and take a look at it. You'd better stop here and catch up on the sleep you didn't have last night."

"Are you sure you'll be all right by yourself?"

"I won't be by myself," said Mr. Calder.

A tail thumped against the floorboards.

It was past midnight when Mr. Calder switched off the engine of his car, let it coast quietly down the last hundred yards of road, and came to a halt under a clump of trees. It was a clear night, with a full moon marbling the sky. He had been driving without lights.

Now he climbed out of the car and stood for a moment. Rasselas sat beside him, head cocked, the tip of his right ear an inch from Mr. Calder's left shoulder. His nose gave a thrust, as if to say, "Go on—what are we waiting for?" Mr. Calder crossed the road and climbed through the boundary wire.

It was tidy woodland with most of the undergrowth cleared, and man and dog advanced steadily on a long slant toward the house.

They were halfway across one of the open glades when Rasselas stopped. He had heard something, away to the right. There was a thick patch of bushes on the far side of the glade, with a slight depression in the middle, which made an admirable hiding place.

From watching Rasselas, Mr. Calder could chart, with great exactness, the progress of his enemies. He saw the ears prick, the amber eyes swivel slowly as they followed something invisible to him. Then the lip lifted in a silent snarl as two men stepped out into the glade.

They were dressed in foresters' uniform with leather leggings, and both carried, slung across their backs, short, double-barreled rifles. Mr. Calder recognized them as the weapons issued during the war to guards in charge of working parties. They threw a spread of heavy buckshot, and were weapons for stopping and crippling, rather than for killing. One of the men carried a stick, which seemed to have some sort of spike on the end of it. The other had a heavy leather whip.

Mr. Calder slid his right hand gently inside his coat until his

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fingers rested on the warm butt of his automatic.

The men walked slowly across the glade, heads turning to right and left, passed within six paces of where Mr. Calder was lying, seemed to hesitate for an instant, then were gone.

It was fully ten minutes before Rasselas stirred. Then he edged his way, silently, out of the thicket. Mr. Calder followed even more slowly. He was a professional himself and he recognized professional opposition when he saw it.

He moved slowly forward, Rasselas drifting beside him like a gray shadow. Now there was only a single line of trees between him and the house, since he was approaching it from the southwest corner and had a clear view of the long southern frontage. He noticed that a light still showed in one of the bedroom windows.

The space between the treeline and the house was dotted with bushes and shrubs, and Mr. Calder reckoned that if he went on his stomach, commando-fashion, it would be an easy matter to keep out of sight until he reached the house. If he could find a window open, he had a mind to explore further. As he started to move forward, Rasselas gave out a very soft, rumbling growl. Mr. Calder paused. When nothing happened, he moved again. Rasselas caught his ankle in his teeth.

At that moment the ground under Mr. Calder's hands gave way. At one moment he had his palms on solid earth. The next, his fingers were slithering over the lip of a cavity which had opened in front of him. If he had been moving forward, nothing could have stopped him falling into it.

It was a deep trench, with sheer walls cut into the chalk soil. It had been masked by a thin net of Hessian, on which sand and leaves had been sprinkled.

Mr. Calder extracted the pencil flashlight from his pocket and directed its pinhead of light downward. Set into balks of timber at the bottom of the trench was a triple row of steel spikes, needle-thin, needle-sharp, and fully twelve inches long.

He thought about an intruder, animal or human, falling onto them. The weight of his fall would drive the spikes through an arm or a leg.

He drew back slowly from the lip of the trench. It extended, so far as he could see, right along the front edge of the tree belt. As he was looking, the single light in the Gast-haus went out.

"There might have been some way round," he said to Mr. Behrens next morning. "But quite frankly I didn't try. I could *feel* those

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spikes all the way home."

"They were expecting you?"

"I think they must have been," said Mr. Calder. "It would take some time to uncover that trench. They daren't leave it open. I could feel a sort of ledge cut inside the lip, so I imagine it's boarded over by day and covered with loose sand. It's the sort of job that would take a couple of hours to do properly. And whatever the size of the staff, I don't see that they could afford to keep two men patrolling all night, and every night."

Mr. Behrens considered the matter.

"The girl might have been suspicious," he said, "when I practically bumped into her at the campsite. But surely—after a full day's drive—with no glimpse of a pursuer—"

"What about the trouble you had near Altkirch? It must have been a pretty definite tipoff to get the French police moving so quickly."

"I had the impression it was my car they were looking for," agreed Mr. Behrens. "The first thing the man spotted was the wireless. But it was only when he saw the number plate that he started to get excited. But if they were tipped off, who do you suggest did it? That man at the camp? Or the girl?"

"Or Nichol," said Mr. Calder.

Mr. Behrens did not sound surprised or horrified at the suggestion. He said, "It's a possibility that has to be borne in mind, of course. I hope it's not true. It suggests one precaution to me, however. The only car they know about is mine. The sensible thing now will be for me to keep close behind him. You keep right out on the wing."

Mr. Calder thought about this for a bit, then grunted. "Yes," he said. "That seems right."

It was half-past six that morning when Shura slipped quietly out of bed. She put a raincoat over her pajamas and tiptoed from the room.

Herr Bauer was in the control room talking to two men. He looked up as she came in. He said, "We had a visitor last night."

"What have you done with him?"

"We have done nothing with him. He came, looked at us, and went away." Herr Bauer glanced sourly at the two men, who shuffled and look at their feet.

"There are traces, too, of a car having driven in. It might all be nothing. It might be something."

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Shura said, "If the car was a dark-blue Saab, then we have been followed across Europe. And I have not the least idea how."

Herr Bauer said, "There are not more than four ways out of the Odenwald. I can have them watched. When you stop for your midday meal, telephone back to me here. I shall be able to tell you then."

Nichol woke up at eight o'clock. He stretched out an arm, found the bed empty, and sat up.

Shura was outside on the balcony.

"I overslept," he said. "Are we late?"

"No hurry this morning. We need not start before eleven. Breakfast is being brought up to us here."

They took the morning's run at a much slower pace. Nichol had the impression that the clock had become more important than the map. They skirted Wurzburg and Bamberg to the south and stopped for their lunch in a tiny village called Plankenfels, ten miles short of Bayreuth.

Shura slipped away while the food was being cooked. When she came back Nichol thought he detected a change in her manner. It was very slight, and if he had not got to know her so well in the three days he had been with her, he might not have noticed it. Something seemed to have put her on her mettle.

During the afternoon Shura did the driving, while Nichol kept his eye on the map. They avoided Bayreuth, making a detour to the south, and climbed into the Fichtelgebirge. Gradually the country became more desolate, the farms fewer, the houses farther apart. Ahead of them, on the map, right across their track and slowly drawing nearer, sprawled the irregular green line which marked the farthest advance of the Russian Army in 1945 and now formed the boundary between the eastern and western worlds.

At this particular point the line joined the national boundary of Czechoslovakia, and ran almost due west, forming a right angle with it. It was into the neck of this sack that they were driving. They had been avoiding main roads for some time and Nichol was hard put to it to map their twisting progress, but in the fading light he glimpsed a board with the name QUELLENREUTH, and knew they were not more than ten kilometers from the frontier.

In the next village they turned left. A moment later, right again. They were now heading straight up into the angle itself, an area where his map was blank. He soon saw the reason. It was thick woodland.

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As they dived in among the trees, they switched on their headlights.

They were running north, and climbing. After about three miles Shura seemed to hesitate for the first time. She slowed to a crawl, her eyes on the roadside. She saw what she was looking for, swung the wheel, and put the car down a sandy road.

The road seemed to go on interminably, diving into the very heart of the forest, a tunnel of darkness among the trees. Then they were in a clearing. Nichol caught a glimpse of a log hut as Shura swung the car round, brought it to a halt, and switched off all the lights.

Nichol stirred, but the girl put a hand on his arm. They sat in the darkness and waited. Then the car door was opened from outside and a man gestured them out. They stumbled across the clearing to the hut; the door was opened and they went into darkness.

A flashlight came on. By its reflected light Nichol saw the face of its holder. He had never met him, but he recognized him at once from many photographs carefully studied. Colonel Tyschenko had been military attaché in Ottawa and Washington and in neither case had his hosts been under any illusions as to his real interests.

"I am sorry," he said, speaking in Russian, "to receive you in this melodramatic way. But we are waiting for the man who has been following you."

"The man in the Saab?" said the girl.

"Yes. He should be here any moment now. We will keep silent, if you please."

It seemed to Nichol like an hour, but was in fact only twelve minutes by the illuminated hand on his watch before there were footsteps outside. The door opened and three men came in. As soon as the door was shut, Colonel Tyschenko snapped on the light, and the six occupants of the hut blinked at each other.

Two of the newcomers were Russian Security men, soldiers in plain clothes. They both carried machine pistols. The third was Mr. Behrens, his hands in his pockets, and a look of distaste on his leathery face.

"He parked his car a quarter of a mile down the track," said one of the men, "and was walking toward the hut when we stopped him. He had a gun. We have taken it."

Colonel Tyschenko had been staring in some surprise at the scholarly figure in the raincoat. Then his face broke into a smile. "Why," he said, "it is Mr. Behrens. This *is* an unexpected pleasure. Where is your friend—the fat little man—Calder?"

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"He'll be here in a moment," said Mr. Behrens. "And he's got six men with him."

The colonel chuckled. "No doubt," he said. "No doubt. The six invisible men. It would be a good title for a film. I should be interested to know how you followed our car."

"It's Nichol's suit," said Mr. Behrens. "It has been impregnated with a particularly potent smell. When in doubt as to which way he had gone, I had only to get out of the car and sniff."

"Remarkable," said the colonel. "Particularly since he will have changed his clothes at least three times since leaving London."

"We found a wireless set in the car," said one of the men.

"I see," said the colonel. "That opens up an interesting field of speculation." He turned to Nichol. "*What* are you carrying that you had on you, *when you left London?*"

Nichol said slowly, "Fountain pen, silver pencil, notecase, wristwatch, and signet ring."

He hoped that the cigarette lighter, which he dropped as they got out of the car, had fallen into an inconspicuous place.

"The details are not important," said the colonel. "We shall be able to work them all out when we get you and Mr. Behrens, and the contents of his car, safely into our own territory."

He turned to the security men and said, "One stays here. One to go and check the arrangements for the crossing. We are using the normal route. Hurry."

The man nearest the door turned and went out.

Shura spoke for the first time. "I hope, Colonel, that you do not blame me for this. I should, perhaps, have thought that some electrical device might be used."

There was a pleading note in her voice that Nichol had never heard before; he had not imagined that such a girl could ever be humble.

The colonel said, "No, Shura. I don't think anyone could blame you too much. Indeed, you did well to take notice of the Saab and call Herr Bauer's attention to it."

The girl actually blushed. "Thank you," she said.

Mr. Behrens, standing against the far wall of the hut where the guard had left him, considered the position. Even now that one of the guards had departed it was almost entirely unsatisfactory. Colonel Tyschenko was carrying a Vostok MU-2 pistol in a shoulder holster. He could see the light wooden butt as the colonel leaned

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forward to speak to Shura. The guard had a German-type Schmeisser machine pistol across his shoulders, carried in such a way that he could swing it round to the front and fire without unslinging it. The girl had a gun, but it was probably in her shoulder satchel on the table. Mr. Behrens and Nichol were unarmed.

The door handle turned very gently, round, and back again.

Mr. Behrens took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He was not fond of violence.

He said, "If you don't mind, I have to go outside for a moment."

Colonel Tyschenko looked at him, then said, "Of course. But I should warn you that this man can put a burst of six shots into a moving target at fifty yards."

"I wasn't thinking of making a dash for it," said Mr. Behrens sourly. He started toward the door. The colonel signaled to the guard, who slipped back the bolt of the door and swung his gun round to the ready.

Mr. Behrens did not hurry. He wanted to be in one particular spot, next to the girl. The guard put a hand on the handle of the door and turned it. The door came open fast, as if kicked, and Rasselas came through in a smooth golden curve, his teeth bared, making straight for Colonel Tyschenko's throat.

Behind the dog waddled the squat figure of Mr. Calder. He shot the guard twice, at close quarters, through the chest, before the guard could get his hand to the trigger of his machine pistol.

The colonel twisted as Rasselas struck him, and the dog catapulted over his shoulder, onto the floor. In the same moment the colonel pulled out his Vostok and shot Nichol, who was jumping at him, through the right side of the body.

Rasselas buried his teeth in the colonel's leg.

Mr. Behrens had wrapped his arms round Shura from behind. It was a temporary advantage only. She was twice as strong as he, and better trained. She pried apart his fingers, grabbed his forearm, and threw him across her outstretched leg. Then she stooped to grab her satchel, which Mr. Behrens had managed to knock onto the floor.

Mr. Calder crouched, steadied himself, and shot Colonel Tyschenko. The bullet went through the colonel's mouth and out at the back of his head. As he fell, his Vostok dropped within a few inches of Nichol's hand. He rolled over and picked it up.

Shura's hand was already inside her satchel when Nichol shot her. He was lying on the ground, and the bullet went upward, through her chest and into the top of her spine. The impact lifted

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her onto her toes. For a moment she looked as though she were poised for a dive. Then her knees buckled. As she fell, she struck the edge of the table and slid off it. She was dead before she hit the floor beside Nichol.

After the last shot there was a moment of complete silence.

Rasselas crouched over the colonel's body, the dog motionless except for the angry twitching of his tail. The smell of the blood had excited him. His ancestors had hunted wolves and had fed on their entrails.

Mr. Behrens was the first to move. He groped for his glasses, put them on, and climbed to his feet. He said, "We've got precious little time. That other guard will be here any moment."

"He won't be coming back," said Mr. Calder. He was breathing heavily, as though the death he had dealt out had been a physical exertion. "I can promise you that."

"In that case—" said Mr. Behrens.

"In that case," said Mr. Calder, "we've still got a hell of a lot to do. And the fact that we've now got all night to do it in doesn't make it any easier. I think the bodies will have to be buried."

"Yes," said Mr. Behrens.

"It's sandy soil, and we've spades in the car. We shall have to put them four feet down."

"Yes," said Mr. Behrens again. It would mean hours of digging. But he could see the sense in it. It was the rule. If you made a mess, you cleared it up. But there was more to it than that. If Colonel Tyschenko, his courier, and his two personal bodyguards disappeared, the first idea would be that they had defected. And the mere suspicion of this would cause their opponents the maximum of trouble and uncertainty.

"Any blood there is, is on the matting. We'll bury the matting with them. We can use the girl's car for transport. After that I'll drive it off and leave it in the thickest part of the forest. This isn't a part of the world where intruders are encouraged. It could stand there until it falls to pieces."

"There's one other thing," said Mr. Behrens. "We ought to get Nichol to a doctor before morning. The nearest one I know of, who won't ask a lot of questions, is a hundred miles away."

Mr. Calder considered the problem.

He said, "Give me a hand with the first part, getting the bodies moved. Then leave me to do the rest."

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"Will you be able to finish before the morning?"

"Almost certainly not. But I can lie up by day and finish the job tomorrow night. I'll see you in Cologne, at our usual place, the day after tomorrow."

And so at four o'clock that morning Mr. Behrens was driving his car once more. His head was singing with the Benzedrine he had inhaled to keep himself awake. Beside him, Nichol was propped in the passenger seat. He had been delirious for some time and was now dozing. Mr. Behrens could only pray that they were not stopped. They would neither of them stand up to much inspection. And unless he could get Nichol into a doctor's hands in time to save his life, they were going to lose half the results of their efforts.

The continental side of Route M they now knew about and could deal with. But the English side—how it worked, who operated it—that was all locked away inside the white face and under the tangled head of black hair that lolled on the seat beside him.

A red light sprang out of the night. Mr. Behrens cursed, and slowed. But it was only the warning light for a crossing gate on the main line from Cologne to Basle.

Mr. Behrens coasted up to the barrier and switched off the engine. Nichol turned his head and looked at him. The sudden silence and cessation of movement had wakened him.

"Where are we?" he said.

"Nearly there," said Mr. Behrens.

"There's something," said Nichol, "that I ought to tell you."

"Don't talk more than you must," said Mr. Behrens.

Nichol hardly seemed to hear him. His body was in the present, but his mind was in the past. He went on in a conversational voice.

"Last night, at that hotel, I made love to Shura. She seemed to want it. It was the most wonderful thing I have ever done. It was the first time in my life. I've been rather strictly brought up. You appreciate that. I'd never imagined it could be such a perfect thing. And then I shot her. I had to shoot her." He sounded serious, and puzzled. "That can't be right, you know."

"In this job," said Mr. Behrens, "there is neither right nor wrong. Only expediency."

The night express thundered past, and the gates rose, and Mr. Behrens engaged gear and drove on.

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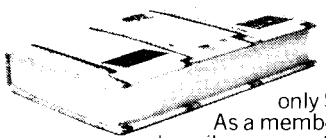

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